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Life in the Neither/Nor:
Figural Representations of Literacy,
Space and Identity

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**Life in the Neither/Nor:
Figural Representations of Literacy, Space and Identity**

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There are social, cultural, discursive, material, and imagined spaces that disenfranchised students who are marked by such “axes of differentiation” (Braidotti, 1994, p. 4) as race, class, gender, life style, and other features often rendered invisible in mainstream students must inhabit as they transition from one space to another over the course of their everyday lives. Because disenfranchised students do not typically differentiate these spaces or have not yet acquired the tools to maintain their equilibrium as they transition from one space to another, they sometimes find themselves as disoriented as ships sailing across tumultuous waters in the midst of a perfect storm.

Over the last twelve years, I have been working to identify and describe navigational tools that disenfranchised students can use nimbly, self-reflexively rather than only intuitively, and tactically—in de Certeau’s (1984) sense of the word—to move *from* one space to another and *within* varied spaces as well. In what follows, I would like to examine that space, as well as other spaces that are often elided, and describe *the modalities of memory*, an as of yet unacknowledged tool that I believe plays a crucial role in how students navigate these spaces.

Braidotti’s description of a figuration—which she defines as a politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity designed to help us “learn to think differently about the subject, invent new frameworks, new images, new modes of

thought” (p. 2)—provides a way to conceptualize the navigational tools we can make available to students. Because this figurative mode functions according to what she calls “the philosophy of ‘as if’”—“as if some experiences were reminiscent or evocative of others” (p. 5)—a figuration has the potential to open up, “through successive repetitions and mimetic strategies, spaces where alternative forms of agency can be engendered” (p. 7). How a figuration works will become apparent as this essay unfolds.

Before unpacking the figuration at the heart of this essay, I present *Life in the Either/Or*, *Life in the Both/And*, and *Life in the Neither/Nor* as alternative metaphorical conceptions for the three positions now commonplace in the field as scholars and researchers work to overcome what Kostogriz (2004) describes as the space-place dichotomy in our conceptions of literacy. I then use the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) on rhizomes, and of Camus (1955) on the myth of Sisyphus, to describe how space functions in the context of *Life in the Neither/Nor*. In concluding, I analyze two autobiographical snippets to demonstrate how disenfranchised students can reconfigure space and time by enacting the *modalities of memory* as a navigational tool to negotiate the challenges they face in *Life in the Neither/Nor*. The end goal is to provide an example of how we can equip disenfranchised students with the tools to negotiate the cumbersome circumstances they encounter in school as a consequence of the non-traditional experiences they bring with them from their home communities.

From Third Space to Life in the Neither/Nor

After the bruising battles led by Heath (1983) and Street (1984) to delegitimize the conservative ideological assumption that it was possible to live in an either/or world, that is, that it was possible to formulate a social space in which people’s ability to use the

modalities of reading and writing could be assessed on the basis of objective standards that imagined social and cultural assets and deficits, we found ourselves in a more comfortable space that privileged context and situatedness and valued difference above all else. In time, legitimate critiques emerged that suggested the inherent limitations of this position. So what happens, critics asked, if you suddenly find yourself in a both/and world that attempts to demonstrate the value of the cultural capital accumulated by the disenfranchised in our society?

If anything, they answered, we end up valuing a set of social practices that have tremendous currency in the local communities inhabited by these individuals but limited currency in the larger, more global communities by whose standards the disenfranchised will eventually come to be assessed and will likely be found wanting. As Brandt and Clinton (2002) pointed out in their groundbreaking essay, “Limits of the Local: Expanding Perspectives on Literacy as a Social Practice,” the new ideological paradigm that emerged to contest the autonomous model of literacy sometimes veered “too far in a reactive direction, exaggerating the power of local contexts to set or reveal the forms and means that literacy takes” (p. 338).

As we have all struggled with the untenable bifurcation of the oral and the literate, the universal and the specific, the global and the local, and the autonomous and the ideological, several scholars in literacy studies (Gutiérrez, 2008; Moje et al., 2004; Pahl, 2002; Kostogriz, 2004) have posited new perspectives of a Third Space based on the work of Bhabha (1994) and Soja (1996). Although she was not aware of Bhabha’s or Soja’s work when she formulated her ideas, Gutiérrez’s (2008) conception of a Third Space is very similar to their more theoretical, post-colonial iterations. Unlike Bhabha

and Soja, Gutiérrez is interested in formulating a pedagogical and curricular tool kit that “nondominant” students can use to fashion a transformative sensibility that will serve as the crucible for collectively nurturing the historical agency they need to nimbly, self-reflexively, and tactically navigate and negotiate the terrain of any given social space.

In Gutiérrez’s view, migrant students in the program she studied used a syncretic *testimonio*, a hybrid form of critical autobiography and *testimonio*, to tell “stories of movements across borders, across both new and familiar practices” which call “our attention to an important and unresolved dilemma in the learning sciences”:

How do we account for the learning and development embodied by and through movement, the border and boundary crossing of students who migrate to and throughout the U.S.? What new capacities and identities are developed in this movement? To what extent do these capacities and identities travel and shift across settings? And what new educational arrangements provoke and support new capacities that extend students’ repertoires of practice? (p. 150)

I will return to Gutiérrez’s work in my concluding remarks when I offer some of my own suggestions for how educators can use what we have learned from our conceptions of the Third Space and *Life in the Neither/Nor* to develop tools that address the needs of disenfranchised students.

While the concept of Third Space has provided us with a lens for understanding alternative contexts beyond the binary systems that inform how we typically construct the world around us, it still has inherent limitations as a theoretical tool because it continues to be constrained by how we conceptualize and imagine space when we use it. Williams (2003), for example, describes how an easy kind of “essentializing and naïve approach to

the nature of hybridity and resistance has been embraced by multiculturalist thinking.” In such instances, “the idea of a ‘third space’ has been employed to describe a benign and ultimately progressive and positivist multicultural synthesis that creates a new culture of pluralistic tolerance” (p. 600). I certainly don’t want to suggest that we should stop using the term Third Space; I do, however, want to suggest that it may be worth our while to consider a slightly different figuration that more directly removes itself from our commonplace understanding of how space functions in our lives.

Arguably the most salient characteristic of the first two theoretical perspectives I mentioned earlier—Life in the Either/Or and Life in the Both/And—is their unrelenting binary rigidity and stability. Whether we are locked in the midst of the black and white, the right and wrong of the former, or the synthetic/integrated quality of the latter, every one of us is able to navigate and negotiate these terrains without much trouble because they both call on our agility with, and awareness and recollection of, highly prescribed ways of being. In the conservative conception of Life in the Either/Or, we have little need to worry about the complexity of the social networks we traverse because everyone pretty much knows (or should know) his or her place in the broader matrix that has been laid out for them to follow. In this context, we typically invoke what Bourdieu (1977) calls *doxa*, Giddens (1991) calls practical consciousness, and psychologists call working memory as we follow the habitual patterns of our pre-formulated lives. In their work, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe this “first type of book [as] the root book” which they contend is firmly grounded in the linear and hierarchical logic of the root-tree (p. 5).

Navigation is ever more challenging in Life in the Both/And, if only because we have a more varied array of different choices to make. Here, we are positioned by a

liberal conception to combine contrastive patterns into new formulations, but in time, these new formulations also become rigid, stable, and habitual. This reflects a different kind of essentialism-in-the-making. In the “radical-system, or fascicular root,” Deleuze and Guattari note,

the principal root has aborted, or its tip has been destroyed; an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development

. . . . [But] whenever a multiplicity is taken up in a structure, its growth is offset by a reduction in its laws of combination. (pp. 5-6)

In other words, while a situated and multicultural frame of reference at first blush suggests that we have overcome the rigidity of a binary system, we soon discover it’s an illusion. The truth is we are still locked within a comparative frame of reference that is difficult to disrupt; we are still prisoners of a multiplicative process constrained by a totalizing unity.

Life in the Neither/Nor, on the other hand, is measured by its neverending fluidity, instability, and unpredictability. As such, it resembles a fragmented, discontinuous, and disorienting space that the disenfranchised—post-colonial subjects in Bhaba’s language—must learn to navigate and negotiate. In Rounsaville’s view, “[a] neither/nor disposition, as cultivated from an interstitial space, carves new possibilities and ways of thinking that do not rest on one culture or another for truth claims . . .” (2010, p. 83). Instead, it mimics Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a rhizome, which because it “has no beginning or end,” becomes a particularly fascinating terrain. Deleuze and Guattari are not so much interested in the either/ors or the both/ands that mark the

endpoints. What really intrigues them is the middle, what they refer to as “between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*,” the “coming and going rather than [the] starting and finishing.” This middle, they contend,

is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (p. 25)

What happens in this kind of middle, what they call a rhizome and I call Life in the Neither/Nor, awakens within each of us a *nomadic consciousness* that requires a dynamic set of nimble, self-reflexive, and tactical capabilities (Braidotti, 1994, p. 23; Guerra, 2004, p. 19).

Although I suspect that Deleuze and Guatarri would be put off by its binary, transcendental, and existentialist characteristics, for me, their discussion of a rhizome brings to mind Camus’ (1955) description of Sisyphus rolling a stone up a mountainside again and again for all eternity. In many ways, the act of pushing the stone up the mountainside figuratively reflects Life in the Either/Or and Life in the Both/And. The act describes the perceived futility of everyday life as each of us goes through the phases that make up much of our lived experience on this earth, phases so automatic that we have only to rely on our doxa, practical consciousness, or working memory—on our habits of mind—to get through them.

What interests Camus, and what I find useful in conceptualizing Life in the Neither/Nor, is what Sisyphus does on the way down the mountainside as he prepares once again for the futile task that awaits him. Says Camus:

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of these moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock. (p. 121)

And because Sisyphus is able to reflect on his condition, “the struggle toward the heights is enough to fill” his heart. At that very moment, Sisyphus is engaged in “coming and going rather than starting and finishing.” One, Camus concludes, “must imagine Sisyphus happy” (p. 123).

In my view, the building block that makes a heightened consciousness in Life in the Neither/Nor even possible is what I referred to earlier as the modalities of memory, that precious navigational tool that Sisyphus calls on as he walks down the mountainside. I should note that shortly after I first “coined” this term in the course of preparing this essay, I did a Google search to see if anyone had used it before. It turns out that Wallach and Averbach (1955) first used it in an article in *The American Journal of Psychology*. In their study, they reached two conclusions: first, that “there are memory modalities just as there are sense modalities” (p. 249), and secondly, that “the conception of memory modality is essential in the study of recognition” (p. 250). Building on prior research and

theoretical work, Sulzen (2001) has since developed a model of modality-organized cognition (see Figure 1 below) that describes a set of first level modalities directly related to our senses (auditory, gustatory, haptic, kinesthetic, olfactory, and visual) and a set of second level modalities (emotional/affective, linguistic, and spatial) that extend recognition beyond our senses.

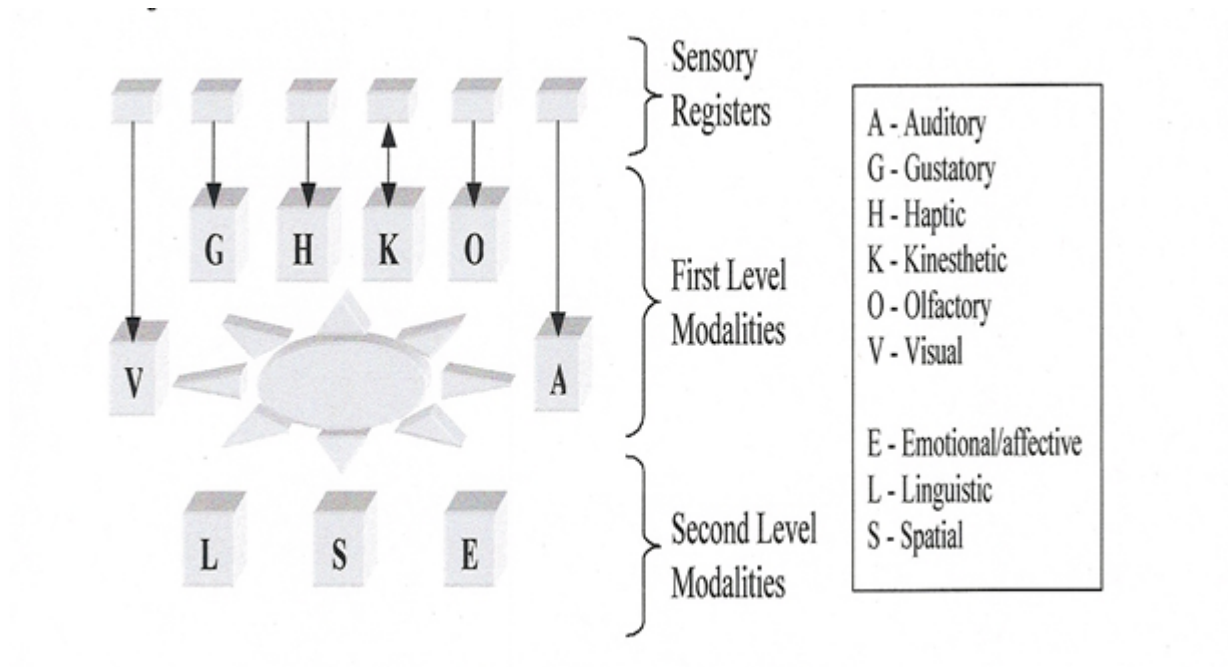


Figure 1: Modality-organized Cognition

Together, these modalities of sense and memory inform how we perceive and interpret, then act in the world. It's important to keep in mind that our memories—which bring together the past, the present, and a possible future in dreamlike fashion—as Kotre (1995) reminds us, “don’t sit inertly in our minds the way they do on an audiotape or the shelves of a library. They are constantly refashioned” (p. 37). As Vivian (2010) concludes in his study of *Public Forgetting*,

we activate the fickle and nomadic character of memory whenever we discuss our memories with others, whenever we preserve them in writing, images or sound, thereby

ensuring that our memories subsist in more than one place and form, in multiple ‘inheritances’ or ‘forms of enactment’ at once. (p. 126)

This discussion about our internal modalities of memory should remind us that the external modalities of sense we discuss with our students in our work as educators are not simply things out there in the world that we use in the production and reception of knowledge. In different ways, each is also represented in and is a syncretic part of our ever-changing and emerging sense of a bodily self, of our evolving and conditional capabilities as historical agents caught in the flux of time. What I would like to do now is to share two autobiographical snippets to illustrate how I believe the modalities of memory make it possible for us to function in the social, cultural, discursive, material, and imagined worlds that we occupy in Life in the Neither/Nor, especially when it comes to our ability to navigate and negotiate this and other spaces in a heightened state of consciousness.

Identity as Lived Experience, or The Body Remembers

No doubt each of us can remember moments in our lives when we felt very much like Sisyphus trudging up that mountainside pushing a weighty stone, as well as those exquisite moments of heightened consciousness when we discovered on the way down that same mountainside, and later remembered many times over, something that shaped our provisional identity in ways we could have never imagined possible. In an effort to present some data that I can analyze and interpret using the theoretical scheme I outlined,

I want to share publicly for the first time two autobiographical snippets that describe key moments in my life informed by a legal document that has haunted me for more than 50 years. My goal here is to illustrate how the modalities of memory can shape and reshape our identities as our memories themselves are shaped and reshaped, not by who we are but by who we are continuously becoming. Hall (1996) puts it this way:

Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not “who we are” or “where we came from,” so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (p. 4)

These autobiographical snippets will also be presented in a textual form that Gutiérrez (2008) refers to as “syncretic *testimonio*,” that is, a hybrid form of critical autobiography and *testimonio* “situated in the subjective particularity and global and historical reality in which people coconstruct their understanding of the social world and of themselves” (p. 149).

In the pre-civil rights summer of 1959 when I was 9 years old, I rode my bike from the housing project in the Mexican part of my hometown of Harlingen, Texas across the railroad tracks to the white part of town to try out for Little League baseball. A white coach who saw me trying out thought I had the skill to make it on his team, so he came over and asked if I could bring him my birth certificate to prove I was old enough to play. I went home immediately and excitedly told my mother I needed something called a birth certificate to prove my age if I wanted to play baseball. My mother hesitated for a

moment, suspicious about why anyone would need what she obviously considered one of the most important documents in her possession, then told me she would give it to me the following day.

The next morning after I reminded her I needed my birth certificate, my mother left the room for a few minutes, came back with a white envelope, and told me not to share it with anyone but the coach. I said okay, got on my bike, and took it to the baseball park where the coach removed my birth certificate from the white envelope, glanced at it, then gave it right back to me. “Okay,” he said, “I’ll see you here at our first practice on Monday.” After I took the envelope and thanked him, I got on my bike and started home. Probably more out of curiosity than anything else, I stopped on my way home, leaned the bike against a tree, sat on the ground, and took the birth certificate out of the white envelope.

The birth certificate was an ordinary piece of blue paper, folded several times over, with information printed and typed on it. As I felt the piece of paper between my fingers, I noticed it had a lifted seal on the left hand edge with a signature over it. I also noticed and became curious about the information typed in the first series of boxes listed next to CHILD. First name: Juan. Middle Name: Cruz. Last Name: Guerra. The middle name caught me by surprise because I had never heard that word uttered in my life. The next set of boxes listed next to FATHER had question marks in them. My mother’s name was typed into its respective boxes. First name: Teresa. Last name: Guerra. I had known for some time that the individual who lived with my mother, my two older Mexican-born sisters, my three younger siblings and me, was not my father—he had told me that

himself—but I had never been told and had never asked who my birth father was or what had happened to him.

At the very bottom left hand corner in a box numbered 21, I came to a final section that had a strange sounding word with a question mark after it: Legitimate? Typed in the box this strange word occupied, I found another word in capital letters: NO. Not knowing what to make of it, I folded the document, put it in the envelope, and headed home on my bike. Along the way, I pondered the blank space where my birth father's name should have been and the word NO in the box numbered 21. When I got home, my mother immediately took the white envelope from me and asked if anyone else but the coach had looked at it. “No, *mami*,” I lied. I then went to my bedroom, took out a dictionary and looked up that strange word. Legitimate: “Being in compliance with the law. Genuine. Authentic. Born of legally married parents.”

Because I was a monolingual Spanish speaker who had never read, written or heard a single word of English until the first grade, almost three years before the birth certificate incident, I'm not sure how much I can trust my recollection that I actually took out a dictionary and looked up that ominous word. After all, as Vivian (2010) notes, our memories “subsist in a state of dispersion [rather than] in the form of a unified or stable presence” (p. 126). On the other hand, I vividly remember consulting a dictionary after my last confession in the Catholic Church a few years later at the age of 13 when the priest asked me if I had offended God, and I didn't know how to respond. Peeved at my ignorance, the priest told me to go home and not return to church until I had an answer.

In a moment that I still recall vividly and viscerally, I ran home and after lying on my bed in tears and saying “Stupid, stupid, stupid” several times to myself under my

breath, I got a dictionary and looked up the word. Offend: “To arouse anger, resentment, or indignation in.” Now whether I did or did not consult a dictionary at age 9 is in many ways secondary; the fact that I remember having done so suggests the extent to which our memories are not foundational but continuously revised on the basis of our later experiences. While the internal modalities of memory influence the shape and the ways in which we use the external modalities of sense we learn in school, they are in turn shaped by the external modalities as we work to develop a cohesive sense of the world.

Eight years later in 1966 when an older sister invited me to spend the summer with her in Chicago, my godfather drove my mother and me to the bus station for the beginning of my 48 hour, fifteen hundred mile journey. After my bag was stored in the bus’s lower compartment, I stood in the early evening drizzle and said goodbye to my godfather and mother. When my godfather stepped away to give us a moment of privacy, my mother took out a white envelope from her purse and said to me in Spanish, “Take this with you, *mi’jo*. It’s your birth certificate. Just in case anyone asks you to prove you were born in this country.” “*Gracias, mami*,” I said. Before I had a chance to take a step to board the bus, my mother asked me if I had a pencil. “*Si, aqui*,” I said as I pulled one out of my pocket. “Write this down, *mi’jito*. Capital S-a-l-o-m-e. Capital C-r-u-z. That’s your father’s name.” I nodded my head, gave her a final hug, and boarded the bus.

Once I took my seat on the bus, I glanced out the window and saw my mother and godfather waving goodbye to me through the rain-stained window, and I waved back as the bus pulled out of the station. Within minutes of getting on the road, I pulled out the white envelope with my birth father’s name on it, took out my pencil and, with tears blurring my vision, erased it in a futile effort to regain a past that had provided the

parameters of the life I'd come to know. What I realized some time later is that once something is written down, once something is entered into the modalities of memory, it can no longer be erased, can no longer be extinguished. From the moment it is brought into consciousness, it becomes an integral element of our navigational equipment and informs our emerging identity.

Over the next 48 hours, I sat on that bus as it travelled from my hometown in rural South Texas to Chicago, at the time the second largest city in the United States. At each stop, I found myself—as I had in that moment when I had opened the envelope on my way home from the baseball park 8 years earlier—in a rhizome between my past and my future, coming and going, increasingly conscious of my place in the world. During that journey, I also literally became part of a larger phenomenon: the diaspora of black and brown people migrating from the south to the north, a migration that had begun in earnest for Latinos the year before with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

So what lessons do my autobiographical snippets, my syncretic *testimonio*, bring to mind for me about how we navigate and negotiate the challenges of Life in the Neither/Nor? On the one hand, I see myself in both cases caught at the outset in the certitude of Life in the Either/Or. As I travelled on my bike from the housing project where so many of us lived seemingly futile lives and crossed the railroad track to the white part of town where children were being prepared for very different lives, I had no reason to question my place in the carefully laid out racist matrix or to imagine that my life would ever be any different than it was at that very moment. But when I opened that white envelope and saw, for the very first time, my life documented so boldly by the very

state that governed our every move, I completely skipped over Life in the Both/And and momentarily entered Life in the Neither/Nor.

For the first time in my remembered life, cracks begin to form in the cage that contained me—if only because I finally knew that I was recognized as illegitimate, illegal, momentarily beyond the reach of the two worlds I had traversed. As I travelled on that bus to Chicago seven years later, carrying that very document in my possession, I again found myself in a state of heightened consciousness—witnessing my world in transition as a wide spectrum of poor and working-class people from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Missouri, and Illinois momentarily crossed paths with me.

My mother, who had arrived in what would become our hometown in the mid-1940s as an undocumented immigrant with a third grade education and two daughters in tow, found a way to survive and nurture the three of us: her two Mexican born girls and me, her first born in the United States. I suspect that is why she felt compelled to write my birth father's name down on that white envelope; she was concerned that the border patrol stationed some 80 miles up the road on the way to Chicago would decide my incomplete birth certificate was inadequate evidence of my citizenship and would deport me right then and there.

Years later, my mother filled in the gaps and told me how when I had been born in a labor camp where she had been living with my two sisters, she had gotten into an argument with the midwife who when she brought me into the world insisted that my mother had no right to include my birth father's name on my birth certificate because they had never married. Somehow, though, my mother persuaded the midwife to sneak my birth father's surname into mine as a middle name. The modalities of memory have

continued to shape and reshape all of these historical moments in ways that have come to constitute the provisional person that I am, especially when it comes to my relationship with literacy. It is, I suspect, not much different for the many disenfranchised students who continue to populate our classrooms in increasing numbers. How we can use what we know about Life in the Neither/Nor and the modalities of memory to help our students navigate and negotiate their way through their educational experiences is what I want to turn to now.

Navigating and Negotiating a Multiplicity of Pedagogical Spaces

The autobiographical snippets I just shared are meant to remind us and our students that, when it comes to pedagogical spaces, the trees we sit under and the buses we ride on are as important and critical to our lives as the classrooms we share. At the same time, it's not enough for disenfranchised students to come to terms with their historical pasts, especially those deeply hidden and shameful moments that raise the pain threshold in ways that, if we're lucky, heighten our consciousness. What I want to suggest instead is that students need to call on their internal modalities of memory any time they employ the external modalities of sense we ask them to use in the classroom.

While we want to encourage disenfranchised students to invoke their personal histories, to bring their lived experience into the classroom and use it as a tool to navigate and negotiate the terrain of their unfolding lives, we also want them to think of these autobiographical moments, not as opportunities for confession in the Foucauldian sense, but as opportunities to constitute and reconstitute themselves in the process of becoming (Hogan, 2005, p. 151). When we represent aspects of our lived experience in the context of confession as a genre, we are constrained by the need to frame them as familiar

narratives that display an internal coherence designed to strip them of their multiple contradictions. Students need to learn to use the modalities of memory to highlight the rhizomatic nature of their lived experience, to wrestle with the multiple contradictions that Life in the Neither/Nor brings to light. When we constitute or reconstitute ourselves, we purposefully disrupt the need we feel to make sense of the world in coherent and highly prescribed terms.

In her work, Gutiérrez (2008) provides a well-travelled and thought-out map for how we can help nondominant students acquire repertoires of practice, that is, “both vertical and horizontal forms of expertise . . . [that include] not only what students learn in formal learning environments such as schools, but also what they learn by participating in a range of practices outside of school” (p. 149). At the same time that it focuses on the sociohistorical influences on its students’ language, literacy, and learning practices, the UCLA Migrant Student Leadership Institute (MSLI)—the subject of her research—addresses their social, economic, and educational realities. The curriculum and its pedagogy, Gutiérrez notes, “are grounded in the historical and current particulars of students’ everyday lives, while at the same time oriented toward an imagined but possible future” (p. 154).

In Gutiérrez’s carefully construed ecological approach, learning is organized in such ways that conversation, dialogue, and contradiction are privileged across learning activities with varied participation structures: tutorials, comprehension circles, writing conferences, *teatro*, minilectures, and whole-class discussions (p. 154). In describing this terrain, Gutiérrez reminds us not to think of the collective Third Space as a utopian narrative because “work in these spaces is difficult and filled with contradictions,

setbacks, and struggle” (p. 160). Instead, she wants us to think of it is “an example of what is possible when educators and educational researchers arrange educational environments in ways that incite, support, and extend students’ repertoires of practice by organizing the frequency, co-occurrence, and difficulty of cultural practices and forms of mediation” (p. 160).

What I want to respectfully add to Gutiérrez’s highly nuanced description of the tools nondominant (in her words) or disenfranchised students (in mine) need to navigate and negotiate the provisional pedagogical spaces they inhabit in our schools, universities, and communities is another set of tools that I believe these students must also acquire and use nimbly, tactically, and self-reflexively rather than only intuitively, to move *from* one space to another and *within* varied spaces as well. What I hope my discussion adds is a different take, a different figural representation of the spaces that disenfranchised students inhabit as they move from one social, cultural, discursive, material, and imagined space to another in their everyday lives. I want us to remind students that the spaces they occupy have been framed in different ways by the different ideological forces that shape and influence the institutions responsible for their education. And I want to argue that it’s important for them to know that the tools they learn to use in the Third Space, in *Life in the Neither/Nor*, can also be used to navigate life in a range of other spaces, most of which tend to sedate them into automatically enacting the habitual patterns of our pre-formulated lives.

Finally, as educators, we need to think of our students, and we need to encourage them to think of themselves, as *nomadic subjects* who are continuously in the process of becoming (Braidotti, 1994, p. 25). They need to know that while they will spend a good

part of their lives in the Either/Or and the Both/And, they will also—particularly if they're disenfranchised—continue to live a good portion of their lives in the Neither/Nor. Ave, a 16-year-old migrant student whose syncretic *testimonio* Gutiérrez (2008) shares with us in her essay, writes:

I grew up believing I was invisible and I learned that my vocation was that of an outside observer. . . . I learned to simply observe everything and everyone, but even that bothered people. I was never taught to fight, so instead I did what I was best at, stay quiet and take it all in. The silence somehow sent them the message that I was dumb and stupid. (p. 151)

In our syncretic *testimonios*, Ave and I both called on our modalities of memory to draw forth experiences that I suspect neither one of us had ever shared with anyone before. We engaged in what Hogan (2005) has described as “a kind of identity formation that is not coerced, but is a freely chosen subjective exploration of experience” (p. 121). We also learned to successfully navigate Life in the Neither/Nor by becoming assemblers of our own lived experience, which in turn alerted us to the new possibilities available to us in Life in the Either/Or and Life in the Both/And as well.

It took me more than 50 years to take command of and share painful moments of heightened consciousness with you in this essay. Fortunately for all of us who support the kind of work the Migrant Institute staff and students in their program have done, Ave shared similar moments in the context of a collective third space at the age of 15. My hope is that Ave is well on her way to learning how to use the tools she acquired at the Migrant Institute to navigate and negotiate the multiplicity of pedagogical spaces she will inhabit in the course of her life. Our task as educators is to make sure we continue to

create conditions in our classrooms that provide students like Ave with endless opportunities to share and shape their lives as they come and go.

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