Contribution of Quotidian Pedagogy to Environmental Education: Revisiting Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Nature in Technological Culture

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Abstract

In this contribution I explore quotidian pedagogy as a method of engagement with the world, education grounded at the nexus of hermeneutics and phenomenology. The significance of this approach lies in how it bridges empirical and theoretical, interpretative and experiential, immediate and reified. Even as it unmasks social construction, exposing the arbitrariness of categories, quotidian pedagogy insists on the experiential, through which we open ourselves to disclosure in immediacy. The method involves reaching students through attempting to understand their existential concerns, through teaching students how to critique the "given", in opening them to disclosure in immediacy.

Re-interpreting the question

Writing my exploratory paper, I felt a need to extend meanings of demography, democracy and accountability formulating the AERA 2005 framework. This reformulation however, does not merely extend the meaning of these terms; the very act of extension reframes the framework and question. These carefully chosen guiding terms: demography, democracy and accountability somehow ring differently, when speaking of them in the ethos of the age of global uncertainty within which they are couched.

The presence of hermeneutical and phenomenological dimensions within the question that appears almost prior to the question draws me towards hermeneutical-phenomenological re-interpretation. I am led to an interpretive-embodied turn when I experience the question as utterance, a sign of our concerns as educators in an age of uncertainty, when its import is felt as pedagogical presence and existential phenomenon. The question is performative, in yearning for transformation from its traditional mooring in utterance. While it is a question familiar to educators, in times where signposts are constantly changing, it is a question that resonates differently. It is an interpretative act to gather in conference in difficult times.

Even as my paper expands demography beyond the human, it also reinterprets democracy broadly, wherein accountability is not only articulated in terms of assessments, but in wider senses of responsibility. In times of uncertainty where we are witnessing historical changes, with sovereignty in question, dissolution of the nation state, economic grip of multinational corporations, changing nature of global conflict, prompting re-definition of what it means to be human: manifestations take on global presence, prompting the re-interpretation of the question animating my contribution.

Locating the shift to hermeneutic phenomenology

Before expanding on my method, I offer a brief sketch of the context in which I locate my issue, methodology and pedagogy. Briefly, it is relevant to point out that my hermeneutic phenomenology is located in the continental philosophy tradition in which we find debates around history, egos, cognition and access. Of significance to environmental education, consequential positions issue from views of history as progressive/epistemically broken, cogitos as empirical/situated, the model of life as mechanistic/self-regulating, cognition as Cartesian/embodied, and access as immediate/mediated.

For instance, history as progressive is invoked in the dominant position that champions capitalism as the end of history (Fukuyama, 1993), empirical egos celebrating the triumph of the subject over the object roots in domination of nature (Leiss, 1972/1994; Merchant, 1980). The view of life as mechanistic over autopoietic not only reduces the cosmos to a clock-like function but threatens to expunge possibility of divinity and/or life as sacred (Latour, 1993). Cognition denying the larger context in which it is embedded forgets the

web of life (Capra, 1996). Uncompromising positions like correspondence theory, holding all access is mediated, refuting possibility of immediacy, conjure inside/outside models that not only create artificial problems but blinds us to that which is always already before us, in possibly precluding us from alternate possibilities (Heidegger, 1977).

While hermeneutic phenomenology is consistent with life as self-regulating (Maturana & Varela, 1980) and cognition viewed as embodied (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) and relationships are nuanced, it is beyond the scope of this paper to expand on these debates. The intent of this passage was to situate the shift informing my paper, highlighting access to immediacy, emphasizing the embeddedness of hermeneutic-phenomenology in debates around history, egos, models and cognition arising from common tradition. Having done so, I discuss how hermeneutic-phenomenology enacts as practice in quotidian pedagogy (Feng, 2003).

Exploring quotidian pedagogy as practice

Reaching students through existential encounter

While the introduction to my paper might appear conceptual at first pass, the heart of my contribution is empirical, wherein the impetus draws from classroom practice, narratives (Feng, 2002; Fulford, 1999; Leggo, 1997; MacIntyre, 1981) and lived experience (Aoki, 1996; Jardine, 1998). Quotidian pedagogy foregrounds existential concerns of students while re-sensitizing that which often appears as "ordinary", "given" or "inevitable" as phenomenal encounter in opening them to disclosure in immediacy. Pedagogically, thus phenomenal encounter could be seen as an imperative in our dual roles as teacher and researchers wherein we learn to pay attention to hermeneutics of despair alongside the

hermeneutics of hope. Even as we empower students with hope as teachers, we need to also address feelings of determinate control they sense over their agency, whether with ecological devastation, war, famine, tsunamis or violence in schools.

Enacted, this means relating to student's legitimate fears when we relate to how they feel finding a world that they did not make. When causality appear blind and nihilism and/or contempt for life beckons, through quotidian pedagogy we inject a sense of meaning and purpose into the curriculum of students who might otherwise be overwhelmed with a sense of alienation. Under the shadow of global calamity, we need to speak in existential terms to students who can find neither definitive answer, consensual framework, nor appeal to an external arbiter to the human. Elsewhere I argued for reviving existentialism in education (Feng, 2004), with this problem in mind, valuing our position as limited, caring beings, for whom meaning and compassion need to be infused with pedagogy.

Language, discursive formations and effects

Existential interpretation can be enacted through empowering students with deep concern for language where they learn to pay attention to the everyday, especially with language categorizing people and objects in the world (Feng, 2003). It is pedagogically critical to merge theorizing with lived experience. We need to draw students' attention to separation of discourses and to counter fragmentation. What happens when we ask students what comes to mind when they think of technology? Do students think of practices, artefacts, materials, and critique around technological change? What happens when we then shift to culture? Do students associate the study of culture with language, norms, representation, regulation, production, consumption, representation, identity, symbols, language, beliefs,

structures, and agency? What happens when students think of nature? Do they switch to notions of holism, interconnectedness, interdependence, organisms, habitat, environments, patterns, and reverence? What happens when we relate these three questions? Through this method, not only might students become aware of the divisive effects of language they also appreciate the need for interdisciplinarity; noting while nature and culture is uttered in ways that distinguish, culture and technology by contrast, is conventionally mentioned in the same breath. Yet, from the standpoint of nature, both these frameworks exclude nature; the former through difference, and the latter through indifference. We extend awareness of the bracketing of nature from the discourse when we find green critique absent in cultural discourses celebrating consumption (Mackay, 1997) and science technology studies (STS), where nature appears as science or scientific epistemology (Latour, 1987).

The power of discursive effects can also be seen when the bracketing of nature extends to practice. For instance, we can show students while typically in *technology* research, we are concerned with issues of equity, implementation and assessment, by contrast with *cultural* research we are interested with socio-cultural issues around consumption, language, identity, representation, and symbols. Contrasted to both, *ecological* research explores our relationships in terms of interconnectedness of the natural realm, species, habitats, organisms and reproduction. Students learn while fracturing tendencies tend to demarcate disciplinary borders, quotidian pedagogy bridges divides.

Conversely, we could identity extant discourses connecting *technological* arguments based upon machine ontology, networks and scientific constructivism with *cultural* studies of beliefs, symbols, language, identity, re/production, representation and regulation, and *environmental* discourse concerns around patterns, reverence and

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interconnectedness. While these are exceptions to the rule, we illustrate how research increasingly crosses epistemological divides, occasionally even voicing imperatives to remap the field (Jagtenberg & McKie, 1997; Soulé & Lease, 1995; White, 1998). To stress interdisciplinarity, we could also point to similarities across seemingly disparate discourses: e.g. identifying similarities between Winograd and Flores' (1986) research on artificial intelligence under the rubric of language with Abram's (1996) thesis that roots modern estrangement from nature within the shift from orality to text precipitated by the invention of the alphabet.

We could cast the problem of language in terms of the social construction of categories illustrating *arbitrariness* of the divisive move in separating nature into natural, cultural, and technological. We could point out when fabrication becomes reified, when "made" appears as "found", what was once immediate becomes reified, with the appearance of the cultural or technological *as* natural and given. We could also show students how the problematic reverses when we fail to see an ordinary ceramic spoon as technology. For both we see the effects of reification: the first moment masks the natural while the second masks its cultural second order, the tool. This is the kind of disclosure that makes lessons of the quotidian.

Incredulity, immediacy, disclosure and obscuring

As practiced through human intentionality (Husserl & Gibson, 1952), phenomenology makes the methodological demand that one attend to the things as they show themselves, rather than as priori opinion, theory or concepts that need to be bracketed in advance. Of relevance to the introductory discussion, phenomenology holds one can directly address immediacy (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) when one is open to disclosure, and presence/absence

equates to truth (Heidegger, 1962). That said, as teachers we need to caution our students that even so, disclosure might not happen; for reification hides the Earth, even as the spoon as artefact obscures technology. We need to teach our students it is pivotal to come to terms with obscuring. We need to teach students to interpret the world differently: to differentiate the benign presence of a spoon gathering community in celebration of sharing of food from the hostile formations around gunpowder when the mode of technology threatens to turn malignant. We need to teach our students a sense of *incredulity* in overcoming obscuring, in recognizing practices around artefacts harmful to or negating of life.

Between Immediacy and Reification

> Quotidian deconstruction is a form of disclosive analysis that focuses on the feelings that people derive from their quotidian or everyday experiences with technology. The intention is to show how we experience culture, nature and technology in tandem. Quotidian deconstruction enables students to realize that technology is nature transformed… and culture is technology transformed… Students focus on their everyday life with technology and use phenomenology to disclose their desires and feelings about culture, nature and technology. There are two basic directions to this method of disclosive analysis. The first is towards deconstruction by connecting everyday technologies to their natural sources… The second is toward phenomenology by connecting the same technology to personal experiences… the goal is to let the artifacts speak in two directions outlined: toward its source (material form) and the way we experience it (phenomenology). The everyday technologies that we use hold stories and disclose our feelings towards them. Quotidian deconstruction is a way of letting these stories emerge with our feelings (Petrina, in press)

Cultivating a sense of lived incredulity

Within the flux of life of the new millennium, with changes on the order of minutes and seconds, teaching students to see beyond the obscuring is critical. In making the shift to experience, students make a phenomenological shift. We need to show students how to be

open to disclosure when told that an animal has been cloned. We need to open our eyes before we give assent to eating food that appears natural that has been genetically modified. We need to refuse to take for granted when forests ignite every summer. We begin to lift the obscuring, when we take heart that long-standing glaciers have begun to melt. Rather than getting used to the presence of masks, we need to be incredulous when suddenly faced with a scourge of new diseases as we alter the terrain, habitats and niches while indulging in cross-boundary transpecies exchange of genetic material. We need to be very astonished when we behold a bottle of life nourishing God-given water that falls as if "natural", under the sign of the economy even as all phenomena is implicated under the same sign, powered through technological change. Disclosure opens us to the lifeworld, when we see through phenomena, unmasking the danger before us that we see not.

While quotidian pedagogy/inquiry mandates an activist pedagogical imperative for the recovery of green moments within the discourse, our practices, and lived interactions, it nevertheless conceives of itself as never fully natural, cultural, or technological. It argues instead for language that steps back from surface concerns with material manifestations, concentrating on interpretation of phenomena of the everyday. In this way, while quotidian pedagogy does not directly address topics around equity in technological implementation, consumption patterns in consumer culture, or how the despoliation of nature endangers all life on Earth, it is nevertheless implicitly and deeply concerned with all of these topics. For quotidian pedagogy also attempts to understand the flux between the discursive nature of language, lived interactions, historical separation of discourses, in the loss of nature from discourse, extending the problem beyond discursive challenges and material constitution of objects to a sense of lived incredulity.

Relating being and knowing to doing

> Initially the environmental issue was mainly seen as a *technical and scientific* problem…{Yet] here science and technology reach the limits of their range of action.. [for] the issues...[were] *social problems*… [Al]though the environmental crisis is above all a result of humanity's actions with respect to nature, these actions are however largely determined by views of our *place* in nature, as well as our *knowledge* of nature… in accordance to the traditional classification of philosophy into the *study of being, knowing and acting*…
>
> <div align="right">(Zweers & Boersema, 1994, p. 4-5)</div>

Fundamentally, transformations alter our ways of being in the more-than-human world in how we know and act. Knowing, being and doing are inextricable. Who we are, and how we understand ourselves in terms of our relationship with Other and the context in which we find ourselves embedded affects how we act. Teaching students the stance expounded by (Zweers & Boersema, 1994), in internalizing quotidian pedagogy, students learn not to see solutions to environmental disaster in terms of technological fixes or in cultural shifts. While aware technological and cultural interventions are necessary, students are taught to grasp problems at the fundamental level, in seeing the world as phenomenon, in learning to see the familiar as unfamiliar, opening up to the spell of the quotidian.

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