Awakening To Soma Heliakon: 
Encountering Teacher-Researcher-Learning 
in the Twenty-First Century

Pauline Sameshima
Washington State University

Anita Sinner
University of Lethbridge

As two teacher educators and researchers, we explored dimensions of instructional practice in teacher education through online forums. In the course of this research, we drew upon our online interactivity as the basis for reflexive inquiry. Analysis entailed coding key themes to create a four-part rendering involving a hyperlinked poem, a video, a parallaxic praxis research model, and a tagcloud. Interpreting experience through integrated multimedia examples potentially increases learning engagement and provides insights to our belief that teacher education must be deeply mindful, reflective, and interconnected to living.

Key words: teacher education, reflexive inquiry, poetic inquiry, parallaxic praxis

Les auteures, deux didacticiennes et chercheuses, l’une à la Washington State University et l’autre à l’University of British Columbia, ont exploré diverses facettes des méthodes utilisées dans la formation à l’enseignement à l’aide de forums de discussion. Au cours de cette recherche, elles se sont appuyées sur leur interactivité en ligne pour nourrir leurs réflexions. Leur analyse comportait le codage des principaux thèmes en vue de créer une représentation quadripartite : poème hyperlié, vidéo, modèle de recherche axé sur la parallaxe et nuage de mots clés. L’interprétation des expériences à travers des exemples de multimédia peut favoriser l’implication dans l’apprentissage et s’inscrit dans le droit fil d’une formation à l’enseignement qui, selon les auteures, doit faire place à la réflexion et être branchée sur la vie.

Mots clés : formation à l’enseignement, analyse réflexive, analyse poétique, parallaxe.
INTRODUCING THE APPROACH

We began a journey of dialogic inquiry a year ago, weaving together a responsive, intuitive, and spontaneous sharing of ideas as teacher-researchers, extending conversations that began in our doctoral program and continue today, transcending physical distance through the immediacy of online connectivity, in email, Skype, and social networking forums. Through virtual conversations concerning learning and living, we came to new understandings about the transformative process of becoming and being teacher-researchers, including how we experienced teaching teachers, and how we perceived incumbent teachers to experience our teaching. At the core of our exchanges reside the changing dynamics of teacher induction, the notions, values, and beliefs guiding teachers of tomorrow, and our rationale for making curricular decisions to challenge and cultivate the role of teachers as life-long learners and learning professionals. In the course of dialoguing, we mapped ourselves into teacher education through themes of struggles, complexities, and joys in the nexus of theory and praxis, coming to a greater appreciation for the future of teacher education as interconnectedness, where practice is a path to mindfulness.

Drawing on our extensive conversations as a source of knowing and as a method of inquiry, we deconstructed our e-letters, coding and collecting salient phrases and aspects that continued to resonate in relation to teacher education. The essence of our dialogic inquiry evolved into two interconnected artful expressions of a poem (Part 1), and video (Part 2). “To Soma Heliakon” is a poem written from these assembled phrases, copied verbatim from our writing, rendered in a weaving strand formation to symbolize how phrases link together across conversations about teacher education, and at the same time, serve to demonstrate how we make meaning through virtual nodes, drawing on intellectual relationships that influence our thinking, moving and writing as an active process of teacher-researcher reflection. The form also reiterates our content – our belief that deep learning is not on a straight direct path toward a test, but that transformative realization comes through tangential experience, where learning, metaphorically, is like the frays of a twisted rope that are hyperlinked to expected goals and intentions.
Embedded in the poem are hypertext links as coloured text that extend to broader networked conversations and multiple paths of inquiry, doubling the purpose of the poem as an arts-informed expression and an example of the kinds of structures underway that are redefining social and cultural learning assemblages. Also, the poem was entered into tagcrowd.com a tool to objectively analyze semantic frequency, creating a mathematical rendering of the poem based on word usage. The resulting tagcloud generated an image of words, scaled in font size to identify occurrence of dominant language features and most prominent thoughts, offering another view of the poem to provoke thought and meaning in the course of conversations. The title of this poem was inspired by the haunting electronic music of Geoff Jensen, and through digital sampling, we generated our artful expressions while at the same time, inviting a collaborative, interdisciplinary community of inquiry to participate in these conversations by extending our inquiry to the social networking site, Curriculum Theory.
THE POEM

one voice our voice woven light double helixing
tenning through 13 laden moons
singing, echoing, extrapolating, interlocuting emails
through crescents and phases reverberating beams
rays sprinkling newness fragmenting out and fractalling in
meeting in words, a dialogic research inquiry
anonymous authorship of generic familiarity
a true essence of artful collaborative inquiry
stirring pearls, mingling strings, mixing voices
in and out spiralling, spiralling, intersecting, overlapping
circuitous thought lines growing, rhizoming a tapestry
social networking, mapping a cartography, tagcrowning

resonating through phrase and passage shifting and sifting
though teaching and learning and living, moving in our change
through storying, encountering, every word becoming
a sentence, a discourse, a world, now and forever
a history and a future, to cradle our students
like grains slipping through the sky, atoms alighting
ever so briefly and through our fingers, each an entire civilization
and we, through a process of emergence
or moment of emergency reach out
unbounded by geography
to grasp the intangible isolation
of being and being teacher-researchers

find a venue here, attend to attention span
position ourselves to advocate for substantial
collaborative research rooted foremost
in shared experience
across time, reflection and deliberation simmered down
simply to fusing words, letters pulled from emails
lexicons drawn through space, pace with no significance
morsels freed from gravity, shifting prosodies to dance
writing paratext and threads into braids of poetic inquiry

a nameless formless emergence of knowing breathes
exhales in relief, feeling the sound landing, generating more
markings, always writing around, moving poignantly around
the unnamed . . . how we are escaping education
anti-teaching? breaking the fetters of our enculturation
betraying our lives’ work to step out, to speak
confidentially of the unspoken, the fear
and even now, here, this moment, to share deeply
the complexity, the layering, the artful design
of our own learning space, the reciprocality
of sharing our learning and in doing, our research
becoming pedagogy, a parallactic praxis of the possibilities
“That is not because definitive knowledge is non-existent,
but because, at least in the perspectives here, definitive knowledge
(such as about what, for example, “works”) as an ultimate goal
distracts from the more crucial goal of continuously evolving
knowledge models that are progressively useful in advancing
learning” says Eric Hamilton. We acknowledge
Bakhtin’s heteroglossia of voices
through multi-media, multi-tier design
we softly challenge the ironies that reside
like ghosts in our classrooms
rupturing between teaching and learning
Mark Schofield says he can teach a dog to whistle
I’ve seen him teach with my own eyes
have you seen the dog whistle you ask?
no. I didn’t say the dog learned how
teaching doesn’t mean learning
we press the spaces together
continuously shifting the cultural scene
where the critical and painful moments of teaching
are pointed at with one finger
where we fear critique and judgment, doubts of rightness how honest can we be? courageous and brave to iterate the emptiness the wanting, the disappointment, the ephemeral disconnect and distancing the intuitive knowing we speak, but are not fully heard ask the simple questions: what is good teaching? what is bad teaching? what is school for? what is important for living well? what is worth trading for this golden age of life where grass and leaves and trees matter and we put our children in rows grooming them with paper and pencil how does our teaching success correlate to student success?

our voices become lost together as our communication evolves in conversations, within communities situated in the spaces between, virtually? amongst common research areas and course work, and mentors and friends shaping our scholarship our lives’ work, through narrative inquiry through Carl Leggo who created a space of possibilities within the context of life writing many years ago, entrusting us with story inspiring our emergence in Bessie and Red fluidly forming what we did not realize only in a retrospective curriculum can we see the background informing our practices, our directions, our expressions recognizing we are not alone without teachers, mentors, researchers, others
we transcend to the intimacy of dialogue
as inspiration, encouragement, excitement
energizing us to write, to create, to engage
again, to encounter

a precious space of hopefulness
bringing forward genuine constructivist knowledge
through collaboration into true voice, a third spirit
of ownership, a hybridization that births anew
inuring deeper epistemological and ontological questioning
while also taking into account a new generation
of academic engagements that offer
the potential to rethink what it means
to author, to own, to learn, to teach
to integrate in ways
that shift definitions of discipline

I am taken aback. She says
“I look for courses across the university
where I don’t have to read or write
I didn’t expect to have to do this in art."
I conjure my ode: re-chant the policy in my mind
What do I believe? I hear the inconsequentialness
of belief without meaning, the irrelevance
of accepting doctrine, knowledge
the necessity of comprehension

strive to blend order and structure and freedom, invested
unwavering commitment, multiple methods of communicating
oral, visual and tactile learning experiences
cloaked in a fluidity of responsiveness
resist teaching what to think, but HOW to think
regard reciprocal learning with
honour, humility, and humanity
instigating, provoking entry points
into the centre of a dual gravity
in tension between heart and mind, imagination and real joyous but never knowing enough aware of the complexity undertaking itself design and delivery thought through to define wisdom as investigation, analysis, experience a learning through personal meaning making dedicating energies to the students respecting intellectual freedom not dividing my attention publicly or privately and yet, I become troubled in the unfoldings residing in the disjunctures and prevailing absences how then do you model critical thinking? I ask what am I giving with simple positive reinforcement without a hint of possible alternatives without disagreement? how do I teach polite subversion outside fear? why teach, what is the purpose? 

while hanging laundry I thought about identifying the source of my art, my photos my fictions, the moments of revelation modeling 21st century teacher education the attention to nuances, being in the moment discovering and nurturing curiosity within the local that is global seeing beauty in the overlooked immediate realm measuring the relation in the mundane admitting inspiration comes from everyday living and moving through geographies works demonstrating simple aesthetic relations and concurrently I cannot model my secret learning the private spaces and emails on the flat screen
surface of my online learning communities
and social network utilities teaming with life
under the smooth liquid sea of photo sharing
and delicious networking schemas
all forming webs of relation, unacknowledged learning
skill sets developed in action, the new pedagogies
of in time funds of knowledge, in sidebars, in tangents
a new dawn learning

imagine
a potluck banquet
with plates and napkins ready

I surrender, let the teacher lecture go
remove I, relinquish the ancient paradigms
of teaching as feeding, release imagination
wake up subversity in order to create
do my part whatever that part is says Richard Kahn
be in movement, flow together, in meaningfulness
enlivening, developing intellectual atmosphere
laugh at myself saying "remember this,
it’s one of the happiest moments of my life."

I redress time, the panic space
drowning under the weight of too many details
the growing academic temperamentality
in the academic silence
using relationships as my music
always striving, yearning for space
feeling a sadness, resistance to
performing duties rather than following dreams
having to do versus wanting to do
never at peace, manically high and low
agitated, for if we do achieve peacefulness
do we cease to be creative?
long and old and tired questions
the same we ask of students
always, what is important?

note the many connections which start to coalesce when I
accept the happening, search forward, reach
marking iterations through sharing, making sense my way
teaching-researching-learning
in the 21st century

THE VIDEO

encounters

THE ANALYSIS

Employing multimedia – text, audio, still images, video – we explored how technology, already reshaping the lives of becoming teachers, is certain to reshape teacher education. This poem and video model the shifting processes and beliefs that we have observed emerging across learning landscapes of classrooms, in schools and in the academy:

1. Learning is transformative when it is meaningful, making static curriculums unsustainable. By changing the role of teachers, and enabling more creative social constructivist approaches, a sort of ‘potluck’ pedagogy may emerge, where students and teachers come together informally and make discretionary decisions that facilitate aesthetic learning experiences. ‘Potluck’ pedagogy describes a deep acknowledgement for what students bring to the table and offers choice in the possibilities for learning.

2. The presentation and representation of learning reiterated in various pedagogic forms evokes and invokes imaginative thinking possibilities. The lesson shifts to become a forum for inventive possibilities for students to enter and engage.

3. Revisiting deeper ontological and epistemological questions, philosophies of wholeness and oneness, and introducing students to introspective and contemplative conversations help to advance past testing
practices students often regard as regurgitating momentarily remembered content.

4. We continually ask: What is school for? What is human success? What is good mentorship and sustainable teaching? How do we learn wisdom through investigation, analysis, and experience?

5. We walk a fine line in the tension between the private and public in order to make personal meaning and above all, encourage creative and energetic newness.

THE RENDERING

Our video blends our individual photographic experiments of abstract light writing created in different spaces and at different times. Our digital images lend to the crux of our online written conversations, with commonalities in our image construction, such as colour schemes, juxtaposed with tensions in compositional shapes suggestive of movement between the blurring of fluidity and the articulation of lines. The series creates unity, and at the same time, generates an allegorical expression of futurism, with qualities of nebulas and star formations, doubling the conceptual framework of “To Soma Heliakon,” Greek for “the golden body of the solar man,” and notions of teacher education as both a yet-to-be discovered frontier that is deeply mindful and an awakening of joyful learning spaces. Fractalling fragments of conversation even further, we deconstructed the poem to “mash-up” our works, overlaying the video with traces of the poem. Echoing the methods of tagclouds, we applied varied font sizes in the video to change the emphasis of words in movement with images and music, effectively creating a video haiku in unison with Jensen’s electronic music. The video is posted on YouTube, and the hyperlinks are gathered from expansive sources demonstrating that conceptions of education, particularly knowledge creation and dissemination of research, is moving to include learning communities outside the classroom. We acknowledge multiple on and offline spaces as legitimate modes of communication. We model through this poem and video the possibilities of educational practice as social capital when conceptions of education authentically incorporate the immediacy of the local and the global.
Our work follows a research model of “parallaxic praxis,” which offers a framework for engaging in creative scholarship where the data and issues are viewed through artful lenses to provoke new understandings of teaching and learning. We invite commentary and consideration from audiences to broaden boundaries of formal and informal dialogue, seeking to bring together student and teacher with equitable intent, shifting the roles of the public academic to enfranchise and encourage social belonging. In this way, we seek to disrupt perceptions of knowledge making and knowledge as power-broking, and in so doing, embracing teacher education in the twenty-first century.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION
We welcome your comments, questions, and critique of our inquiry in an online forum as part of our continuing conversations concerning art,
technology, education, and curriculum theory. Through exchanges on this site, we seek to constructively and collectively unfold integrated artful research.

INFLUENCES

We acknowledge that this work is grounded in a complex confluence of experiences, readings, relationships, and research over time. We are indebted to the individuals and work evidenced in the poem links which have become part of this dialogic learning process. Below are references which inspired this particular work.

CONFLUENCES


Rhizome as a mode of knowledge: Deleuze & Guattari


OUTLOOKS

The Euphoria Project – a science/art film which discusses happiness as engagement

Just-in-time learning and Just-in-case learning


METHODOLOGIES

Arts-informed research

A/r/tography


Pauline Sameshima, Washington State University, psameshima@wsu.edu, PO Box 642132 Pullman, WA 99164-2132. Pauline is a teacher researcher with interests in learning system designs, technology integration, eco-responsive pedagogies and creative scholarship.

Anita Sinner, Post-doctoral Fellow, University of Lethbridge, anita.sinner@uleth.ca, Anita is researching intermedia spaces involving the arts and life writing. She is a sessional lecturer in Art Education at the University of Victoria.