The Choice: Teaching difficult avoiding silencing or the multiplicities of our words and our subjectivities

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Abstract

This is about responsibility or toughening up perhaps through deep linguistic approaches to research and science, education, theory and practice. It is about teaching difficult avoiding silencing normalizing low threshold whistle blowing. It is about de-authorized knowledge creation processes conditioning learning. I speculate on the/a moral mass of words perhaps to come become and life. They facilitate … the words … They oscillate, vibrate and rotate, and I get a chance to forethink. Ultimately, this is about the beingness of engagement and risky becomings.

Keywords: becoming ontologies, learning organizations, silencing, responsibility, moral mass of words, forethinking

Starting Right There

It was April 2014 and I was asked to be substitute teacher in a master class in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The participants all worked—or had worked as ECEC professionals—some of them in leading positions for years—and were now also part-time master students. The theme I was asked to teach was ‘Philosophical and epistemological perspectives on quality, change and development’. I lectured and went from structural to procedural quality discussions to ECEC as learning organizations (Dalin, 1999; Garvin, 2000; Senge, 1999). I went from modern to postmodern ethical perspectives and/or dialogues (Bauman, 1993, 2005; Burbules, 1993). The students and I discussed traditional cognitive, socio-cultural and developmental psychological approaches to learning and research, and after that moved towards discourse analytical approaches (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2001; Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1982). Accordingly, we discussed different views on and concepts about the child and childhood and/or what constitutes a child; child as nature, as reproducer of culture, child as innocence, child as future workforce, child as consumer, child as knowledge constructor, as actor,
as agent, as meaning maker, child as participant in a democracy. Rhizome children that is and how new ontologizations of the child might create new possibilities: the potentiality of virtuality and/or virtuality as empirical materiality ultimately making virtuality productive.

I therefore ended the day with a lecture on poststructuralism and immanent philosophies through Levinas (1998), Foucault again (1979, 1980, 1982), Derrida (1967/1976, 1978) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) followed by post-constructivist qualitative research approaches and how to document actions and research/science on/with children. Together we discussed (ultimately deconstructed) concepts of the other, power, empowerment, governmentality, deconstruction, rhizomes and nomadism, neo-materialism, becomings, embodiment, subjectivity, performativity, aporias, events and experiments. We deconstructed the concepts of research data, analysis, results, truth and representation. We deconstructed the concepts of text and textuality moving towards post-humanist multiparadigmatic storytelling, diffractive reading/writing and the creation of performative words and ‘smooth spaces’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The way I presented it; a move from a linguistic to an onto-ontological (Derrida, 1978) and/or onto-epistemological (Barad, 2007) turn in theory and practice: a deep linguistic approach so to speak and becoming ontologies; the multiplicities of any word, one and our subjectivities. Further, as the engagement in iterative processes and the materiality of language itself. The moral mass of words that is, and forethinking (Reinertsen, in press):

Words (I saw them with my eyes when I was three years old) are our dwarfs, our gnomes, our minuscule workers in the mines of language. They perforate our deafness. They forethink. And at times they are the Scandinavian tomtes or else the imps. Naturally they know what goes on in the more or less well-tended corners of the back of our mind. As everyone wants not to know, we have all the words we deserve. These little so ancient agents never stop joking and bringing us gifts in secret. Too bad for those who consider words to be worn down pebbles … . (Cixous, 2005, p. 121)

And to elaborate a little: This implies an acceptance of immanent microscopic things and matter in every perception, notion or inclination simultaneously however destabilizing the same perceptions, notions or inclinations. All perceived objects (words), organic or non-organic, have own lives and is only felt through tensions in its moral mass and molecular tiny or atomic parts. An ethics, a morale or moral action (read e.g. teaching) thus only exist in matter and in the local here and now. Now is further comprised of masses of elements and/or ‘lines of flights’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3) coming together related to one another in expanded inter/intra-relational connections, thus words that perform and/or performative words. Deleuzian (Deleuze, 1990) ‘aions’ and Derridean built in ‘heliotropocy’ of words (Derrida, 1982, p. 299) that is: No analysis, no interpretations, no representations, questions only and everything quasi. ‘An entire logic of paleonomy’ it is (Derrida, 1971/1988 in Kamuf, 1991, p. 108). Words and things and thoughts never becoming one: Meaning thus never a portable property; unruly rather. The thing itself always escaping and the hermeneutical question of what is cannot be answered. Yours and mine, ours and theirs—does not matter who says; it is there.
This is what I call a deep linguistic approach always through aporia or formal nega-
tivity as the beingness of engagement and risky becomings in research and science, edu-
cation, theory and practice ultimately teaching; research with teaching. Braidotti (2013)
says: ‘The linguistic signifier can at best distribute entrapment and withhold empower-
ment. Its sovereign power builds on the negative passions it solicits, making hungry
where it most satisfies, through envy, castration and by encouraging addictive patterns
of consumption of material, discursive and cultural goods’ (p. 188). Further, this is
the condition for creating a ‘becoming machine’ of ‘radical transversal relations that gen-
erate new models of subjectivity, held in check by an ethology of forces. They sustain a
vitalist ethics of mutual trans-species interdependence. It is a generalized ecology, also
known as eco-sophy, which aims at crossing transversally the multiple layers of the
subject, from interiority to exteriority and everything in between’ (Braidotti, 2013,
p. 92). Professionals (read researchers, teachers, me…) always therefore ready to
actively reacting, creating, unfolding, coding, recoding and decoding processes of both
research, educational programmes and structures (read organization) continually. Learn-
ing, ultimately seen both as a function of measures (read teaching) educators (read
leaders) initiate, but simultaneously possible through differànce (Deleuze & Guattari,
1987; Derrida, 1978). A move from individual learning trajectories to recognize our
common entanglements already entangled: Intra-actions of always already entangled
relations (Barad, 2007): The concept of learning ultimately seen as a judgemental
inflated word if not deconstructed.

We then discussed possible political consequences and what entangling as both edu-
cators and researchers within a heterogeneous world … of words …—our matter of
concern (Latour, 2004) would be becoming that of constantly both challenging and
expanding on limited visions of quality, change and development we were there to
discuss in the first place: The tasks for Early Years Educators and professionals becom-
ing that of de-authorization (Spivak, 1993) of knowledge through creating a decentred
language thus building in a willingness to confirm rather than reject insecurity, disagree-
ments, dilemmas and paradoxes, and thus simultaneously avoiding crippling thoughts
about a need for a pedagogical consensus which ultimately might prevent learning and
professional development.

As we were about to finish for the day, one of the students suddenly said: ‘This is really
difficult, you know’, and I could see in her eyes that she knew she had a choice. A choice
between complying to, or following already worked out educational systems, plans and
documents, conformity, silence even perhaps, and something that would position her as
a critical thinker always asking questions about the same structures: the main object
being to engage not only critique and extract. Choosing a commitment to saying yes to
freeing lines of flights therefore perhaps. Choosing always becoming different with
others speaking for herself only, and the same for others. Choosing always to be
working towards possible exceeding forms of social contracts as the quality and learning
potentials we look for. The microontologies of selfmaking and environment … — a tough-
ening up perhaps? I do not know what she does or what she chooses to do. But I know she
now knows (not) what when and responsibility: The beingness of engagement. Chose
good … I hope …
Starting Again

Today is 22 July 2014. Three years after the terror attack at our governmental building in Oslo and the youth camp at Utøya. Seventy-seven people killed (Reinertsen, Ryen, & Otterstad, 2013). Very little is changed in Norway. ‘We are still silent about themes we have always been silent about’ (Professor Ola Svein Stugu in Kringstad, 2014, pp. 6–7): Political extremisms and what about these so called disturbed individuals in our societies? Leftwing rightwing interpretations ...—preferring the one or the other explanation. And what has it to do with me?

The report after 22 July 2011 clearly showed us that much needed to be changed in our country:

- The ability to acknowledge risk and learn from rehearsals (on security measures) has been too small.
- The ability to go through with measurements and use the plans already developed has been too weak.
- The ability to coordinate and interact has been deficient.
- The potentials of information and communication technology (ICT) have not been fully exploited.
- Leaders’ ability and will to clarify responsibilities, establish goals and take measures to reach results have been inadequate (Norges Offentlige Utredninger [NOU], 2012, p. 16).

The report continues: ‘In the commission’s opinion these lessons are mainly about leadership, interaction, culture and attitudes—than a lack of resources, the need for new legislation, organization or major value choices’. And further: ‘Last, but not least, July 22 clearly showed how individuals can make a huge difference. The commission thinks that the measurements that we recommend will make both society and individuals better capable of meeting future challenges. They will come. Therefore it is important to address the fundamental challenges. It is urgent’.

On the last page, after the list over technical, administrative, structural, legislative and political recommendations, and before praising the very important contribution from volunteers having done a tremendous effort in saving peoples’ lives, the report finishes with the following statement:

First of all there is the importance of speaking up. Crisis can be avoided or handled better if individuals express their worries or engage themselves when they discover deficiencies and defects. Instead of speaking up they become passive bystanders, even if they have valuable information and represent valuable perspectives which would increase the ability to prevent or manage a crisis situation. July 22 is namely also a story about the fact that many people knew about systems that did not work, and systems not being implemented as planned. It is often so, that in situations in which many people observe the same phenomenon, they fail to speak up. Where there are experts and authorities involved, there is an extra tendency of turning many into passive bystanders. The commission thinks that speaking up about societal risks is an important part of our individual responsibility. July 22 taught us that vigilance
and engagement can play a crucial role, and that it is important that seemingly small and perhaps insignificant details or weak signals get adequate attention in time. (NOU, 2012, p. 459, author's translation)

“What July 22, 2011 will mean for us in the future is totally up to ourselves” (Associate Professor Tor Einar Fagerland, in Kringstad, 2014, pp. 6–7). Thus the urgency, in my view, of avoiding silencing and creating a wide understanding of educational policymaking and organizations (any) subsequent teaching and learning as open ended and complex as in rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) perhaps processes that cannot be reduced to rational processes of linear implementations. Rather, education/organizations; teaching and learning as negotiated, translated, interpreted, contested and de-authorized knowledge-creation spaces open for more and other always. That is the only fundamental … responsibility … society … moral … life … if there is such a thing … and my/your/our miniscule words. Being/doing words and words being/doing ontology work. The words and/as the/a value of our forethinking thus more if we want. Come.

… I sense that in each book words with hidden roots beneath the text come and go and carry out some other book between the lines. Suddenly I notice strange fruits in my garden. It is these verbal dwarfs who have made them grow. And what words do between themselves—couplings, matings, hybridizations—is genius. An erotic and fertile genius. A law of life presides over their cross-breeding. (Cixous, 2005, p. 121)

These seemingly small and perhaps insignificant details or weak signals … getting adequate attention in time … and low threshold whistle blowing … knowing what when not and responsibility … inclusiveness eventually … a choice …

The Beingness of Engagement; Teaching Difficult Avoiding Silencing Normalizing Low Threshold Whistle Blowing

Shifting between lecturing and word exercises during the day, I first asked students to:

a) put words in plural to see if something happened. For example, what happens with you if you speak of your identities instead of your identity; your subjectivities instead of subjectivity? What happens if you speak of the organizations (ECECs, schools, universities) you work in, not the organization? What happens if you speak of learnings instead of learning? What happens if you speak of qualities instead of quality?

All the exercises here can be expanded and adapted to the theme being taught. The important thing is to open up and challenge traditional visions and conceptualizations.

b) turn nouns into verbs. For example, from I am a woman I am me. To I woman I me—use the gerund: I am a leader I lead. I am leading. Womaning?

This is an exercise to play with the eventfulness of a word/theme/issue. It is an exercise that can be used to provoke. The eventfulness of woman. Woman as event—unpredictable of what comes next. Woman as provocation … leadership …
c) deconstruct dichotomies and words and find examples of the same word being used differently, in different contexts conveying different meanings. In a self-reflexive metaperspective, it is what I have tried to show above through starting right there and starting again.

Here the concepts of responsibility, individuality, learning, professionalism, dialogue, risk taking, power, leadership, structure, quality, implementation, method, expertise, interaction, culture, attitudes, engagement, choice, research and representation gave themselves as relevant…. The concepts of vigilance, awareness, alertness, observation, attention, watchfulness, care and caution also engaged the students. This is an exercise that can be done in a very formal way or one can just use it as a kind of brainstorming.

(d) consider and discuss what, how and when a word is inflated and judgemental and why?

‘Starting and starting again’ is again one way of doing this. However, use texts that suit you in your teaching. In my view this is an important exercise to avoid distrust, indifference, silencing and even cynicism in organizations. Learning is often prevented because of a lack of words that works other. Therefore:

(e) engage students in rambling plasticity wordmaking and gender mashups: Cixous couplings, matings, hybridizations…. Create new words, meaningless words, words without content and word-play. It is an attempt to make possible and create hyperbolic spaces and convexity effects, trying to avoid definitions stimulating new thoughts.

Karen Barad’s ‘thinkingfeeling’ (2007) is classic. I have made a few. Thinkfeel with them: ‘articlepoem, realfantast, theodata, theopractice, inspiraction research, and velcrohooking pedagogies’ (Reinertsen, Ben-Horin, & Borgenvik, 2014). You can go on.

In my view, this is rehearsing de-authorized knowledge production de-authorizing myself and my words, ultimately avoiding trusting our methods and words too much.

(f) consider and discuss what uses of satire, humour, naivety, glamour, horror, ugliness and examples of bestiary even might do strategically for you as professionals in ECECs and as researchers?

(g) consider and discuss how paradigmatic text mix, text mess and mashups might create new. Discuss what would be mind blowing for you as ECEC professionals and master students.

(h) consider and discuss the importance or not of random field notes, memories, hunches, processes, patterns, trial-and-error practices in/for research. From which ontologies and epistemologies do I/you/we draw sustenance? What do I/you/we extract from it? What does political positioning imply?

(i) forethinking and observing the next; imagining forward (Gaventa, 2006 in Lather, 2013; Reinertsen, in press). For example, imagine the collective in the individual. Imagine subjectivities not ideologies.
(j) consider and discuss what it would take … normalizing low threshold whistle blowing … risky becomings …

(k) write your own story of wonder. Give an account of yourself; things that are possible; the failure encounters that constitutes you.

This is the last exercise and due when we perhaps meet again. These are entangled past present stories and professionals/master students choosing own educative processes.

Last Start

She might have had an ‘epiphany’ (Denzin, 1992). It might have been a moment of intensity. Anyway, she was introduced to a ‘politics and ethics of the difficult’ (Richardson & StPierre, 2005), and I might consider using Britzman’s list (1995) over difficult knowledge as tool next time. For me this is about teaching awareness thus turning pedagogy into a human social science capable of redefining the possible again and again; redefining the possible and/or potentiality, ultimately the practicality of possible lives. It is therefore pedagogies of situated knowing only thus about being there, being interested and responding/responsive. That is my throwntogetherness style of matters of concern, my style of teaching of/in/with this material world. My worldly pedagogical methods of following texts not only as consistently as possible ‘cold eyed and sober’ (Caputo, 1997, p. 85), but deep … and with the Scandinavian tomtes or else the imps … my miniscule words … my beingness of engagement … it is a toughening up. It is urgent … —and children as participants in a democracy … choose good …

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