

## A writing story: Opening up to judgement—Individual assessment as system assessment or writing as school

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**Abstract:** This is a writing story about trying to create just classroom assessment practices not excluding anybody and therefore an attempt to explore what an opening up to judgment, and in my view, what assessment focused on learning might mean and subsequently imply. Social justice and democracy is at stake. How to develop and improve our assessment literacy? How to develop trustworthy and good assessment systems? What are our tools and what methods can we use? Given a discussion about either summative or formative assessment and preferably both, this is primarily an attempt to think about principals before turning to instruments or starting with the beginning and beyond rather than the endpoint. I argue for keeping classroom assessment as an indefinite problem, a problem not to be solved or a term not to be understood once and for all. That will hopefully foster cultural pluralism and heterogeneity around the term: learning more, learning all, all learning. Ultimately this is about the linguistic conditions for change; but as a move from language to law and as aporetic thinking and through the pivoting but liberating effects of writing; a writing both positioning and giving direction. Through language and as a right to philosophy that is. It is about creating a heteroglossia of a fresh writing inscribed in, through and with otherness; “another logic” that is.

**Key words:** school reform; philosophy of education; assessment literacy; performative words; post structuralism

### 1. Introduction

Both the theory and practice of education have suffered in the past from an over attention to what ought to be, and its correlative tendency to disregard what is. If theory is ever really to be translated into practice, theorists must learn to follow it through the social dynamics of the school room. Only so can experience be fruitful in the understanding that will make possible a change of things that are (W. Waller, 1932, p. 459).

When I hear words like *assessment, classroom assessment, individual assessment, evaluation, judgement* and *accountability*, I almost get scarred because I start thinking about the monstrosities of what this might turn out to become or mean if we do not engage in some serious philosophising (read thinking) and start worrying about the words. I sometimes think I hear marching boots... Still, I do believe we need to assess, judge and/or evaluate both of and for learning and school performances—assessment as learning even and account for what we do, but how? The words seem to be in our way but not. I therefore calm down a little when I qualify issues concerning these themes through theory and take into consideration all the good intentions of—and the well meaning people who are working with this in the best interest of both students and schools: the quest for justice clearly informing efforts. In a Norwegian context for example, there is now a huge project running called “better assessment

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practises” (“*Bedre vurderingspraksis*”, <http://www.utdanningsdirektoratet.no>) in which this is primary focus. I am part of this project. Classroom researchers, again including myself, have for years written about real dilemmas real teachers are faced with in schools and thereby showing the complexities of the subject; cultural, conceptual, ethical, political, societal, economical and pedagogical dilemmas: didactical negotiations between theory and practice and/or teachers developing deep pedagogical content knowledge in their classrooms, in which assessment is part. Inside schools; best practices do exist (None mentioned, none forgotten).

However I get scarred again when I realize that what we are up against today are tendencies that curricula are primarily “*expressed in terms of evaluation*” (Lundgren, 2006, p. 12) and that one of the fights we have to fight today is a fight for so called “*intelligent accountability*” (Stobart, 2007). I then ask myself what unintelligent accountability might mean and I get sleepless. And to make it even more complex, at least for me, I cite one of my favourite thinkers: “*We are weak today in ideal matters because intelligence is divorced from aspiration*” (Dewey, 1920, 1957, p. 212). I then ask again; what is a judgement and how are they made? What might they become and what must they not? Or rather, how to approach and work with issues concerning judgement, assessment literacy and creating just assessment systems and what is my responsibility? What is idealism, what is realism or what kind of idealism and realism do we talk about here? Theory and practice, practice and theory... How to create more? How to learn more? What might this aspiration intelligence be?

What I want therefore is to open up to judgement, but only through what judgement is not, what it must not be and what I do not want. Only through the negative form or formal.

Negativity (aporia) this opening might turn out to become, in my view at least, something worth considering. This is therefore not about what judgement is or what it looks like, but about creating, hopefully, the possibilities for something good, something practical and something wise as far as judgement and thus assessment is concerned. Or rather; this is about turning assessment and school into playing fields of language and all of us becoming language players or language workers one may say: practical philosophers and philosophers of practice; teachers, researchers, students too: translating theory into practice or at least trying to always.

If we this way, as I do, perceive working with improving our assessment practices as a work involving reforming and therefore changing something and doing something new and other, it is ultimately a question about agency and moral perfectibility. Moral perfectibility as simultaneously being preoccupied with what is perfect and what is not: with what I dream about, aspire, the fantastic or virtuality and reality, with absence and presence, sameness and otherness, rights and responsibility, inclusion and exclusion, freedom and control, with both critique and self critique. Such are the tensions in which we live and both poetic and argumentative registers are in force. This is therefore not about criticising others. Rather it is an attempt to contribute to the discussion about what creating a pedagogy in the field of assessment and/or judgement and assessment literacy might involve thinking about and subsequently or hopefully suggesting something about what it possibly might take: Opening up concepts for more always and paradoxically letting go of knowledge and subjective certainty; normalising therefore not knowing for sure. Agency ultimately about the construction of subjectivities (read identities) and as writing: a writing subject; action in writing.

I remember one of the first Ph.D. disputes that I attended. The theme was project work and the use of ICT. A Ph.D. student had examined and compared three different schools. After some discussion one of the opponents sighed: “*What will it really take for teachers to change*”. And I remember that I thought: changing me, changing others—what is the relation? But little did I realize then about what I had started within myself.

Another way of knowing perhaps this is through language and philosophy and through asking questions

always. Asking hard questions about principles, the start, me, and beyond. This is thus an attempt, an example or a writing towards a de-authorized and double(d) perspective of learning and assessment in schools. It is an example only out of which one hopefully can make a pedagogy (read politics). Maybe this is a third, fourth and/or fifth ... way. At least it is an attempt not to take part in any dichotomies or any axiomatic thinking. No speaking for or against anything, nothing right or wrong, no one right or wrong. No blame no shame. If I say that I like green, it does not mean that I do not like red. Rather than being preoccupied with dilemmas I have come to realize that I need to concentrate on the paradoxes of learning: that is to be very realistic to see the fantastic. Why? It is to try keeping or following the concept through, the positive ideal—learning that is—following learning through. Following learning through theory; following learning through practice: practice and theory through learning that is, through the social dynamics of the school room. Learning of, for, as and through judgement that is: keeping the concept of learning through the negative terrain always. Idealism as realism: *realdealism* maybe, *aspirintelligence*? What does this student need to learn? What must this student know? Does he know enough? What must I do? Have I done enough? What can I do? What else can I do? What must I not? But it is not easy; there is no ease, no comfort zones just hard work always and difficult: identifying my (your)self as learner, without closing. Individual assessment as system assessment one now might say. It is ultimately an argument for turning society into language society rather than the knowledge society we predominantly speak of today. Our democracy—justice—thought of as depending or resting upon linguistic development and participation. School therefore as a discursive institution; an institution of language play only.

I will go on or start again with what I fear, what scares me and what I worry about. Intertwined, indirectly and all through my flesh and blood, I will say something about the things that calm me down if put to work or rigorous play. Finally, there are these other ways. Ways in which we hopefully become aware of both the interconnectedness between but also the interdependency between concepts (read activities) used in the pedagogical field of assessment—students' learning and teachers' learning interconnected and interdependent. To make it perfectly clear though; this is not about or a pedagogy to make others learn and act, but a pedagogy for learning, acting and doing something my (your)self. It is about life and learning to live with differences. Speaking, reading and writing "*through my own voice*" (Derrida, 1995b, p. 140). Becoming aware of more and more; learning more as I go along. Reform inscribed in language and thereby the creative meaning of words. Never—no one—becoming expert though. No authoritative knowing or knowledge; rather "knowing" and "knowledge" only. Dreams perhaps as the stuff schools should be made of, or rather; "dreams" only. I am writing about something that I do not know what is and no ones utopia.

No overattention no disregard, therefore neither overestimating nor underestimating anyone or anything: Writing as school.

## 2. The fear of constative words or concepts only and what I worry about

On the one hand we have a model with new principles, but simultaneously we continue to speak with old words. That is the problem. We need new words. We must try to really risk something here. Or is what we want just to try again and again to return back to old arrangements or something that is almost the same (Teacher, 30 years of experience at a high school in Norway. Field notes, 2003. Teacher's own emphasises).

When we focus on judgement, we focus in my opinion on the core issues of school; quality issues and issues concerning power, authority and control—issues about knowledge and democracy, issues about values and morals;

being, becoming, existing as a teacher (researcher) in the first place or at all. Issues therefore concerning how the world is (re)presented by and for us: what kind of reality; society and school we want. This is not only so inside schools and between participants in school life, but also between school and society—or even broader; school and life in general. Therefore what I fear most is losing words or a lack of words: a lack of words that always work otherwise that is. I want open words—dynamic words—or words that are always open for more; words I know I (can) introduce meaning into: words being showed/showing themselves in practice. I thus want words that work or perform; “*performative words*” (Caputo, 1997). I want more—to create more—learning and knowledge production really. I fear constative words or words defining, closing, reasserting or revising claims only. I want words that play/work, words playing, fresh words new/old always and I must be the player.

I fear instrumentalism. I fear reductionism. I fear stigmas. I fear injustice. I fear inequalities, dictatorship and subjective certainty: people (me) not hesitating. I fear exclusion. I fear unquestioned inclusion. I fear a too narrow sense of what normality is. I fear that I do not fear enough: I fear that I do not fear not learning. I actually fear not learning anything at all. I fear opposites only and fights for and/or against: power struggles as such in school. I fear buzzwords like heterogeneity, pluralism, complexity, dialogue and even difference might cover up realities and therefore pedagogy becoming theory only—not alive: experience or practice not thought of as fruitful or even worse; just forgotten. And then I mean forgotten. Or as a student (Field notes, 2003 (student’s own emphasis)), said to me in an interview: “*Everything is very theoretical here in a way. One could have **read** it all! One does not have to **experience** it to understand how it **is** in a way. Normally it has to be experienced in order to understand how people are together, but here everything can just be explained with **words** because that is what it is like*”. I fear not being aware of what I do; that I am too unaware of what I do or not realizing what I do. I fear not doing anything at all and even not realizing it. Docile bodies maybe—mine. However, there is no point in losing control, in having no power and authority as such or in no theory, instruments, methods or knowledge at all. I must judge, but I must be very realistic and aware about what I do. Or to lend the words of another favourite of mine: “*How to meet the tyranny of things and the hegemony of thoughtlessness and strengthen political judgement*” (Arendt, 2004).

My intention was to do a qualitative micro ethnographic case study of a team of teachers engaged in school reform and changing their classroom practices. And I came to realise or learn something about how difficult this is, or again how paradoxical the question of learning and agency is. In fact this is exactly what has proven to be the most difficult of reform, namely; “*to bring about improvement at the heart of education-classroom instruction*” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995/2003, p. 134). I therefore had to turn towards myself. I had to see myself, and then I mean really see myself. Therefore also I think I have learned something about how difficult changing assessment practices or doing something new or else in this field also might turn out to become: judging according to what a particular student might need for him/her to be learning something new—and then also again I mean new; intervening and/or compensating for real inequalities, real injustices perhaps. Working through complete otherness? What might it mean for a student today to leave school after 10 years without the ability to read and write properly? What is justice, and what must I do? If I want to live morally that is. Not that I think I can or that I know something that others do not—and that I am in any way better than you, but I can and must try—living morally that is. That is my approach; that is my responsibility. How now to create a pedagogy in the field of assessment? Or rather, and because most things are already said; how to engage in a “*kind of adaptive tinkering that preserves what is valuable and remedies what is not*” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, 2003, p. 136). Taking care of the best, bringing with me the best in tradition maybe; tradition and change that is: between the dream and reality of

democracy and writing it always—*Asperintelligence*?

And to avoid that you now might think that I take too lightly on this question of morals (and maybe also morale) or that I either try to hide myself or that I do think that I know something, I will tell you a joke. Well, it is a joke again told by someone wise. In August 2004, Zygmunt Bauman was in Trondheim, Norway, to lecture about how to live a moral life. A person from the audience asked him what we could do and where we should start? He seemed worried about the state of affairs in the world today. Prior to the question Bauman had amongst other things talked about the Holocaust. I guess the man in the audience hoped true to our habits I guess (Dewey's ghost here somewhere?), that the wise Mr. Bauman had a piece of advice. And he did. Bauman answered by telling a joke: "*An old couple was on holiday in Ireland in a car. They stopped in a little village to ask for the direction to - or how to get to Dublin? They were lost. The person they asked smiled very nicely and answered; 'Well, yes it is possible to get to Dublin from here, but if I were you I would have started another place' "*. And here I am and if you have read James Joyce's "Ulysses" (1922, 1993); you know that Dublin is Dublin, is Dublin, is is... I will return to write this other place: this place "*of absolute dynamis*" (Derrida, 2003, p. 146). It is, I think, as close as I can get in grasping what the social dynamics of the school room might be about. It is here now though. But first: here is something about the things that calm me down.

Because I ask: are we not, considering the constructivist times we live in, in the best position ever to achieve exactly what I want or to avoid exactly what I fear? In general terms, we do have a whole body of theory concerned with issues of the subaltern between people, countries, gender, class, race, ethnicity and worldviews, in organisations, in institution (read school) or any relation. Also those between me and you. Further, we have theories about learning emphasising situativity, individuality, the distributive notion of knowledge and the promise of dialogue (Again: none mentioned, none forgotten). Ethical issues and issues concerning values are discussed and acknowledged as decisive and important. We speak of relativising and/or the preliminary nature of knowledge. This should be a good starting point.

Still further and more specifically concerned with assessment and judgement, we have a body of theory explaining what it is and what to do and not: classroom assessment for example understood as varied approaches to the theme itself, but also as varied methods precisely in order to meet cultural pluralism and student heterogeneity. Further; assessment emphasising feedback and inclusive teaching methods, and finally assessment methods construed to actively engage students in learning processes: assessment for learning or assessment forwarding learning. We are developing signs, marks or criteria for what is and how to reach clear learning goals and subsequently methods for tracking every student's work towards the same goals. Or referring to Bernstein (1971) and the three message systems of "*framing educational knowledge*" and simultaneously also putting Lundgren's earlier statement in perspective: Expressing curricula also in terms of both pedagogy and content or subject matter, not primarily in terms of evaluation and maybe that we are even trying to compensate exactly for that. We are expanding our repertoires. Action research has become a preferred or recommended approach for both teachers and researchers preoccupied with the theme (In a Norwegian context again: see for example Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskift 1/2007 and Dobson, Engh & Høyhilder, 2007). Good assessment practices possibly therefore becoming a means even to construct new meaning for developing new identities, new realities and action. Therefore assessment as the possibility for discussing power/knowledge relations in school and exactly what I want.

### **3. The denial of change and/or maybe realizing something about the beginning, this**

## “other logic” and this other place

When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make: irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program (Derrida, 1992a, p. 41).

So my answer is yes, if put to work and rigorous, as you (will) see, Derridean play. Because what I have realised or what I think I eventually “found” in my research, was teachers and schools being caught in a web of authoritative knowledge, teachers’ control and power only. Not because they did not try to change. Not because of any resistance in particular. But because of a lack of words that work otherwise always. Or to use the words of the teacher above—giving it back and talk to him and with him; there was not enough risk taking and old words only. Or to put it in a more scientific way: *epistemic* language games and also those of *phronesis* were both too tied to a knowledge<sup>1</sup> (Reinertsen, 2007, 2008, in press). And now I run to underline or stress again that this is about me as researcher and practical theorist too. This is about researchers’ learning too: learners all—all learning, learning schools—changing all, all changing perhaps. If that is what it takes. For a long time I was caught in my web and what I today perceive of as my subjective certainty. My constative words only. Or to refer to Waller again: no translation from theory into practice. There was not enough play in my/your/their words, and it took time and effort to realize it. We are in need of new words; students, teachers, researchers all, or rather as you now might expect—“new” words only; “tradition” only. That is if we want to keep the concept of learning through, following the concept trough that is, translating theory into practice and learning something new; “assessment”, “judgement” and “action research”; old words, but new. Britzman (2003, p. 18) argues in similar ways when she poses, after having studied young student teachers trying to create themselves as modern, new or fresh teachers but through simultaneously problematising traditional myths about what a teacher, and ultimately teaching is about—and again I speak for myself, that:

Many of the participants had great difficulty making a voice from experiences, and then, experiencing what voices they managed to make. It was this double sense of voice, as both borrowed and made, as tradition and change, and as continuity and discontinuity that came as such a surprise. And at some level, while all of the participants understood voice as an artifice of the conditions and institutional pressures made from teaching, there was tremendous emotional pressure to prove oneself worthy, to forget feelings of helplessness and not being in control, and to pretend that one had already learned and so could just go on with teaching. When this occurred, voice became like a pre-existing position one expressed, not an existential dilemma that allowed for new learning dispositions.

Popkewitz (1998b) is also in my opinion pointing in the same direction when he through Foucault’s (1979) term “*governmentality*” discuss the power knowledge relationship in schools and in pedagogy and thus ultimately in what he terms “*the construction of the teacher*”. What Popkewitz wants to do is to move toward a rethinking of the problematic of inclusion/exclusion, and this is, still in my opinion, certainly about creating a pedagogy in the field of assessment. Governmentality gives attention to how political rationalities are embodied in the norms by which we reason about the social administration of the particular modes of behavior and manners of “being” inscribed in the construction of subjectivities. Through an enlightening but in my view frightening discussion about the social space of the “*urban*” and “*rural*” child, (and drawing on Derrida’s deconstructive work on the

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<sup>1</sup> Here I refer to Aristotle’s distinctions between episteme and phronesis. While episteme refers to a scientific, theoretical knowledge denoting a fixed form of “know that” found in language games with denotative components, phronesis is often translated as practical common-sense based upon wisdom, prudence and “originative causes that are variable” and indicative of the evaluative language game. Phronesis can be said to deal with particular cases, while episteme and also that of *techne* deal with general rules.

Greek term *pharmakon*) the “*alchemies*” of pedagogy and teacher practice as a normalizing technology, Popkewitz claims that schooling and thus pedagogy is a struggle for “*the soul*” of the child but as an “*effect of power that is played out on an unequal playing field*” (1998b, p. 119). Constructing and creating inequalities and even racism (Ibid, p. 120); or here the “*urbanruralness*” of a child: excluded children, children becoming/made into losers at school that is: children losing out in school—learning little, learning nothing, negative learning, school even becoming a hell for some (Engaas, 2008). Too many just quit. What is this school anyway?

The denial of change in educational change; To accept the categories and cognitive structuring in the space of schooling as the problem of study is to deny change in the process of change” (Popkewitz, 2000, p. 27).

And this is the pivoting point: an excluded child, excluded by me and in need of help I say and I am both helper and judge! Being a teacher (read researcher) being about helping others to learn I ultimately build upon. Popkewitz is ultimately arguing that discourse is a cultural and political practice and reason as the effect of power, and therefore he is turning pedagogy into a powerful mix of pedagogy, policy and power or rather a pedagogy/policy/ power. Further, what Popkewitz terms normalization refers to a process that normalizes the teachers who do or rather here administer children creating such a pedagogy being created: the institution of pedagogy. Pedagogy as institution: the instituting violent moment of pedagogy: the instituting violent moment of school—research. Popkewitz concludes that there are thus “*systems of exclusion embodied in the discursive practices of schooling and reform that compare, differentiate, hierarchize, and divide at the level of subjectivities*” (Ibid, p. 138). Further he argues that “*while reforms draw attention to the inequities embodied in schooling, they leave unscrutinized the spatial politics embedded in pedagogy*” (Ibid, p. 120), or put in another way: “*the spatial politics of constructing identities remain unscrutinized*”: the construction thus also of the identity of the teacher that is—Me and you; my soul too. Here is something from my field work again: teacher, “*The intention is that you shall work according to the plan that you have got*”. Student, “*No*”. Think about it. Read again (My intentions? What about them?).

As far as research is concerned Popkewitz (1998b) constructs a critical ethnography focussed on the making of the teacher to try to confront such issues and he argues that we need to shift the focus from conventional notions of socialization of teachers to the systems of ideas embodied in the organization of teaching that construct and normalize the teacher who administers children and thus actually what he does is enacting the possibility of research opened up to differences or rather as we shall see: *derridean différance*. Popkewitz therefore claims that: “*It is the rules that construct the social spaces in which we problematize the world and self that must be interrogated*” (Ibid, p. 122). As far as method is concerned he further argues that “*the strategies used to define, organize, and interpret data, are political projects that ‘construct’ objects even as we study them*” (Ibid, p. 133). And he is citing Gramsci (1971) when he states that “*The very act of categorizing, distinguishing, and differentiating ‘data’ are themselves political*” (Ibid, p. 133). Research ultimately also inherently political through the way it constructs the object of study. Popkewitz creates new words, like the “*urbanruralness*” of a child above, to avoid traditional categorization. I will try—have already tried, the same. In fact this is what I try all the time here. I am trying to make words work always by keeping them open. Open for more open for other. Open for meaning. Performative words: Words therefore showing themselves in practice, words being shown in practice. Challenging *doxa* maybe I try: asking hard questions about myself, about what I do, about what I think, how and why. All the didactical questions again and again and again. Asking hard questions about language. I am asking hard questions about the beginning, the start and therefore this other place. How complex is complex, how

difficult is difficult and what is my responsibility? Creating a heteroglossia of a fresh writing, I try, that inscribes and is inscribed by the rules of an unborrowed code and following “another logic”. This is “*one that can self-consciously evade the conceits of the metaphysical arrangements it is reacting to or may use in the performance of critique. This would presuppose: firstly, the inversion of the argumentative logics, the hierarchy of which privileges a normative arrangement of concepts from a binarization of terms (Good/bad, right/wrong, etc.); and, secondly, a displacement of the epistemological groundwork coordinating the ethical acceptance of the formal structuring of its concepts that organize the “essential” possibilities of thought itself*” (Trifonas 2000, p. 81). This way I try to avoid answers and turning to solutions. Resisting closure I try. Playing with language that is or developing rather a “*writerly reticence*” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 971), more humble, letting go of subjective certainty trying not to say everything to everyone every time. It is a writing therefore that might be said to be failing always—activist, evocative, redeeming (without) perhaps—all quasi—fresh always, because I want to. I am becoming aware of more and more only as I go along that is. And then you can talk back to me, talk to me and with me. Discussing (our) assessment practices we can again and again and again.

Popkewitz (1998b.) argues that constructivism is remaking the problem of inclusion/exclusion through its focus on seemingly universal dispositions and the problem—solving capacities of the child. Popkewitz however problematizes such universal capabilities because: “*They inscribe norms that disqualify certain children at the level of their being, rather than through their subject positions—group categories of race, class, or gender*” (p. 560). Urging us to rethink constructivism he does. And/or to rub it in even further (I rub)—at least the dangers of not doing so (rethinking I mean): a stance of an *a priori* subject (in theorizing) “*becomes an authoritarian ruse by which political conflict over the status of the subject is summarily silenced*” (Butler, 1992, p. 4). No words working. This is the work/struggle: questioning authority always—in dispute with authority always I must/am. And you too. This is what I must worry about; working with my own assumptions, my authority, my identity; working with my own words—otherness always: and I repeat; the words I must use but have to open up and problematize: “words” only or “concepts”: highlighted but weakened, highlighted but crossed out or over so to speak. “Constructivism” only or constructivism, “identity” only or identity: “power”, “authority” and “control” only. And as far as research is concerned and as you already have seen: critical ethnography, critical action research; “ethnography” only and “action research”. And consequently: “findings” only, “truth” only or after truth only: weak, but strong, performative words or words working, and paradoxically thereby increasing our importance—authority—meaning—both as teachers, researchers and ultimately that of school. Now we might talk about judging—“judging” that is—again and which interventions that I make might help the individual student to develop and learn. This adaptive tinkering; preserving and remedying; and in my view thereby grasping the full potential of both language and philosophy as procedural means in knowledge production processes if we let them. This is trying to breathe life into pedagogy and school. Or as Derrida puts it himself: “*real life*” is itself ‘something’ inscribed in a determined textual system” (1967, 1976, p. 160). Writing stories that is; “*writingstories*” ... It is about opening up for more always because there is always more to “know”. I will go on theorizing a bit more about this writing, these other ways, or maybe one could call it a move towards an “*ethic of discussion*” (Derrida, 1988): this being active in passive verbal relations. Discussing assessment that is, together that is.

**4. The other ways, a third, fourth or fifth...way, or perhaps it is about a pedagogy of hesitation and insecurity, a “slow” pedagogy maybe or the art of being negative**



And it is precisely in this tension between the dream and the reality of democracy that a space of agency, critique and education opens up, which signals both the normative and political character of democracy (Giroux, 2005, p. 53).

Through capitalizing on the homonymy between the French verbs for differing and deferring and his creation of the nonword *différance*, Derrida captures the essential openness or fictionality inscribed in every word: the identity or stability of the system of traces is differed-deferred because it is “*vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element*” (Derrida, 1982, pp. 13-17). Every word is thus *constitutively short* (Derrida, 1994b, 2005) or autoimmune. Any term or any name can thus never be identical with itself is immune against itself, never anything as such, and therefore never completely covering or conveying the meaning of a phenomena, subject or object, however precisely therefore any term or name will make up an indefinite number of possibilities, thoughts, dreams, ideas and this again makes possible or rather conditions, yes, affirms creating more and other. All words can thus be said to be put in quotation marks only and having therefore no meaning in themselves, or a meaning of undecideability only; “meaning” only: *différance* is all there is always. Neither word nor concept but a “neographism” (Derrida 1982, p. 13)—of *différance*.

For Derrida, and through a process of “*haunting and mourning*” (the first is referring to a notion about language or words being haunted by ghosts (THAT or IT: trace, case, something) that we have to learn to live with, talk to and answer in order to keep them—the words—the concepts—open to meaning open for more. Philosophically mourning is “*ontologizing what is left after problematizing a concept*” (Lather, 2004b, p. 9)), translation is language play. However, or as you now have seen, not as acquiring some available technique in a particular language but involving itineraries of translations leading simultaneously towards or away from some language in particular, and therefore “*translations even ‘inside’ these languages*” (Derrida, 2002, p. 29). This is, to sum up a little, a post structural, post critical, post representational and post interpretive stance of language; linking language, subjectivity, social organisation and power/empowerment together: language does not reflect reality, rather it produces meaning and creates social reality. Interpretation is not the discovery of meaning, rather the *introduction of meaning* (Spivak, in Derrida, 1967, 1976, p. xxiii). Talking back to Waller I am: keeping him alive. Mourning Waller I am in a Derridean (2003) fashion: about this translating theory into practice and following learning through. I am mourning Derrida actually, mourning theory and practice. Theory play. Practice play. Knowledge play. I am offering no assessment alternatives or methods. I am opening up to judgement through language play only.

Derrida deconstructs the relation between reading/writing ultimately writing/speaking and situates the subject (ipse-ipseity) as writing, and creates a scriptural subjectivity, however still *readable* through a machine like *structure of repeatability* or what he several times calls *iterability*. This term is crucial for understanding this interplay between subjectivity, writing, social practices and institutions addressed in Derrida’s works. It is a word drawing together the Latin *iter* (again) and the Sanskrit *itara* (other) (Derrida, 1971, 1988) and is therefore “*the logic that ties repetition to alterity*” (Ibid, p. 7) entailing thus both; a structure of signification thus both describing and transforming, and therefore doubling everything, double(d) and to come: a writing or practice thus consisting in following as consistently as possible a *graphics of iterability* or again this *structure of repeatability*. Following theory through ...

Derrida further deconstructs both the Cartesian and the phenomenological idea of subjectivity as self presence. However this does not mean that one should stop thinking about subjectivity, objectivity and certainty, but know or acknowledge that it does not exist, but still it is something that we must always think with, at, in or

through. Through such a spreading the contents of any concept will constantly be envisioned and made clearer, however not as what they are or what they mean and therefore what I subsequently should mean or think about it, which choices I have and what decisions I accordingly should make, but as all the possibilities that are there and what I or we can wish for, what we want and what we must. What this student need for him/her to learn. This is therefore not about choosing between options, but making decisions on the basis of a judgement that I have made in relation to the obligations, duties and responsibilities that I have: what I want to keep. What I think valuable. What this student must learn to be able to go on and be OK. This is what Derrida calls “*Rresponsibility and hospitality towards the other to come and through the double(d) logic of the gift*”. A gift (read education) must never be given with thoughts of getting something in return. This is exactly to avoid fixed programmes, models or institutionalisation and always opening up for more. Or as Levinson (1998, p. 284) so wonderfully puts it: “*to keep its concept, which is for writing what self-consciousness is for persons, sealed in its practice, it might perform the symbolic act of instancing a subjectivity that is not given in advance and that is more permeable to its textual and social environments than is customary in our critical language games. The embodiment of these possibilities may be the most powerful thing critique can accomplish today*”. When I/you assess, evaluate, judge learning.

### **5. It might also be called the art of being negative and “slow”**

Why however the negative form (aporia) or formal negativity that resembles that of negative theology? How hard is hard, how difficult is difficult, or rather how paradoxical is paradoxical? In short it is because the negatives are there and should be worried about. They give us the things to think with and about; both as reminders and tools. Not through any dialectics or any dichotomous either/or, right/wrong, before/after and both/and thinking or referring to what is or not, rather through the impossibilities of both. One could perhaps say that the “*without*” is all there is referring therefore to the necessity and the risk of going through the trials of the aeries as a “*certain experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible; the testing of the aporia from which one may invent the only possible invention, the impossible invention*” (Derrida, 1992, p. 41): reform without reform, identity without identity, judgement without judgement, knowledge without knowledge, school without school: Something else, something different, a trace, something other, a supplement, otherness, more always. Someone and something to come—always. You. Further, it is to remind us that any affirmation (read concept, school, pedagogy/politics, research and/or knowledge) must announce itself through a negative form, because that is “*the necessity of experience itself and the risk that every promise, every engagement, and every responsible decision - if there are such—must run*” (Derrida, 1993, p. 19). Think again about what the student above said. It is a practice Derrida also (1982) refers to as being “*under erasure: a double gesture, a double science, a double writing*” or; a practice between concepts and between presence/absence and therefore beyond conventional epistemology and/or ontology and any subsequent rationality or rationale. This is a type of de-authorized knowledge-production processes (onto-ontology or de-ontologization as Spivak (1993) prefers to call it) or a writing in which one deconstructs or questions everything we think we know or rather puts everything under erasure.

Derrida emphasises three aspects of the aporia that are decisive and necessary to go through and experience. First there is the aporia of *suspension*, second there is the aporia of *undecidability* (here Derrida builds on Søren Kierkegaard) and finally the aporia of *urgency*: any judgement or decision is therefore both with and without rule or regulation, it is made through undecidability because we will never know for sure, still and however it is urgent

because we must act. We must decide. We must judge. This is therefore a double(d) practice or writing as a simultaneous appearance and disappearance of the “proper” (name) and thus in awareness of the originary violence of “*arche-writing*” (Derrida, 1967, 1976, p. 140); the violent instituting moment of any institution (read concept, school, pedagogy/politics, research and/or knowledge); in awareness thus also of the nonethical opening of the ethics and “*arche-writing*” therefore both “*as the origin of morality as of immorality*” (Ibid, p. 140). This is both the law and its force—“*force de loi*” (Derrida, 1994a, 2002) and the mysterious but engendering and enabling aporetic (non)foundation of authority: certain but uncertain, knowing but not knowing, judging but again and again. Assessment methods without methods. An awareness thus of both the liberating force and therefore effects of writing but simultaneously an awareness of writing having a pivoting effect for getting serious and real both about oneself but also about getting serious and real about oneself in relation with others: about “*the peeling off of any reality and the lie in any truth*” (Haaland, 2005), and through my body, my style always. And I say it again: now we may seriously talk about improving our assessment practices again, judgement and decision making. Now we may seriously talk about moral perfectibility. Me and you. “*One should be very realistic to see the fantastic*” (citing myself): children learning how to read and write: democracy—justice—realized in every activity in every classroom always. And to suggest new—or (non)words here again, trying to make them work: “*readingfantastic*” and “*writingdemocracy*” as what goes on.

In general terms, this is an “*attempt to redirect pedagogy toward postmodernism*” (Løvlie, 2005). However, and more specifically; this opening up to judgement might better be perceived as a form of reality construction or an attempt to answer up to at least a fleeting postmodernity without direction. Haaland (2007) calls this a development from dialectics to trialectics in which three types of representation take place: spaciousness (the room or place), historicity (history) and sociality (the social). Knowledge about what is in the room is constructed by what is seen, what is perceived and what is lived. In this way this is an attempt to think pedagogy as politics/action created in and of a sense of the place; the social dynamics of the school room. It is ultimately an attempt to bring pedagogy “home” to where it belongs; to school, at school for school and give the words back.

After having deconstructed Plato’s text *Timaios*, this is a place Derrida (1995a) continues to call *Khôra* after the Greek noun for place; *khôrion*. But not as a here or there, now or then, before or after, not as a beginning or end, not actually anything at all within the Hegelian dialectical distinction, but as this aporetic third place or thing, which almost is not there at all, but still is a trace; “*trace*” (Ibid), something, secret, almost; impossible to categorize or capture. A place of reconstruction through philosophy maybe (Dewey’s ghost here again)? It is a place where perhaps—“*The perhaps*” is the most just—*just*—category in or for the future (Derrida, 1997, p. 27): a place of and for all things. Nothing is disqualified only its axiomatic representation. All interconnected and interdependent; everyone, everything; in this absolute dynamis. I thus talk about linguistic and philosophical conditions for change a place “*atopoi, atemporal, alogos*” (Derrida, 1981): a place without place, in a time without time and through a logic without logic. I talk about linguistic and philosophical conditions for creating just assessment practices—dealing with quality issues in a just way in schools regardless of time, place and a fixed rationale. Humans all we are. A “*khôralizing*” (Derrida, 1995b; Lather, 2007; Richardson, 2005) of practice—me—is what I talk about: a “*heterodidactics between life and death*” (Derrida, 1994b, p. v viii ).

But it is difficult: not dangerous, but difficult. Derrida invites me/us to philosophise or think in the abyss—to get lost in knowledge, or writing. This is a process Lather (2004a, 2007) describes as “*getting lost*”. Pitt and Britzman (2003) call it a process of *push and pull* between *lovely and difficult knowledge*. Lovely knowledge is that which reinforces what we think we want from what we find, and difficult knowledge is knowledge that

induces breakdowns in representing experience. Difficult knowledge thus works otherwise than simply to secure or revise claims, and it is what makes us wonder if there is more. It is also what we love when lovely knowledge is lost. This is therefore not about losing oneself in knowledge. It is about knowledge that loses itself in the necessary blind spots of understanding. The necessary exclusion that is the very organizer of whatever insight might be made and critical texts always turn back on the very things they denounce/renounce.

A “*politics and ethics of difficulty*” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) this might be. Taking care of the negatives because they are there: a “*non dialectics*” (Adorno, 1944, 2006), messianism or religion without religion. The art of being negative it is perhaps about: philosophers/thinkers/teachers/researchers putting the negative picture in connection with the positive original ideal, however simultaneously selecting or singling out pictures as negative in the sense of bad; with broken connections to the positive: negative to the negative. It is not a method. Writing is this blend or vacillating between theory, practice, knowing and not knowing; theory and practice theory and method, dream and reality... And I am a part: my subjectivity/will is part. A travel through thoughts perhaps it is: thought-movements. A professional attempt, an attempt to learn: an attempt to strengthen ethico-political judgement in school for school. It is a research/writing/instruction/assessment/learning/education that is “*human driven*” (Butler, 1992) only and in which human needs melt together with an understanding of language. Or to put it another way: “*We cannot move theory into action unless we find it in the eccentric and wandering ways of our daily life...Stories give theory flesh and breath*” (Pratt, 1995 in Jones, 2005, p. 763). And here is one of mine; my writing story that is.

This is asking teachers (and students) to improve their/our assessment practices or opening up to judgement but at the same time asking them never to think that they will ever know what it is because they must not, because the minute they think they know, they have what they must not; the monstrosity of a future we do not want; the dictatorship of subjective knowing and thus closure; a paralysis without exit because of lack of words that work otherwise. Marching boots... Rather by not realising words/concepts, they can be free and realised or invented again and again and again; teachers and students creating or inventing their assessment practices again and again and again; inventing school again and again and again: “*writingfantastic*”, “*readingdemocracy*” and “*workplay*” together. Keeping assessment thus as an indefinite problem and reinventing it again and again and again. This is asking a researcher to do research into assessment practices or judgement but asking her never to think that she will ever know what it is, neither assessment, nor reform or research, because the minute she thinks she does she ceases being one. Rather, ask her to keep on. More humble. Open for more. “*Writingresearch*”, “*researchspeaking*”, “*researchvoice*” producing “*writing stories*” and “*documenting becoming*” only (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 966). Finally these references were given to you about what I try to do or what a writing story might be. It is a messy text and a writing not running to meet anybody. Or rather a writing not taking authority away from anybody. I have nothing to tell you. There is no message as such in the writing. Remember I do not know what it is. But I am talking to you and then you can talk back to me. Remember this is only an example out of which one might create a pedagogy, not a pedagogy as such. I am learning more and more. I am trying something here. I try to play. I worry. I fear. I try to see myself. Very realistic to see the fantastic or at least what I do not want. Derrida without Derrida). “*Research as self-study*” (Lunenberg, 2008) perhaps this might eventually be called. It is perhaps, at least in my view again, a pedagogy of insecurity addressing, but in an indirect way, what it might imply to work to overcome “*those social relations of oppression that make living unbearable for those youths and adults who are poor, hungry, unemployed, refused adequate social services, and under the aegis of neoliberalism, viewed largely as disposable*” (Giroux, 2005, p. 77). School being hell for some:

too many giving up....

Finally, and to show you that I have not forgotten: Appelbaum (1995) argues that blindness has its privileges. Through tentative movements the blind person might see what the person with vision might not. Because instead of making use of direct lines of vision to distant objects; she gropes her way across the terrain. In this groping there is a “*poised perception*”. This is “*a gathering unto a moment of novelty. It is perception of traces of hidden meaning. It is the perception that belongs to the stop*” (Ibid, p. 64). The stop is slowing us up, it takes longer to do things, it takes longer to make sense. It takes longer to write. “*Slow Pedagogy-Slow Method*”: the stop being a version of deconstruction ultimately, in which “*a smooth narrative that has been brought to presence displays a break or an interruption that opens up the uncertainties of Otherness*” (Law, 2004, p. 164). Making more people function in school, making school function for more people. Making more people learn. Opening up judgement and thus school for more and other—more and other voices, more and other knowledge—knowledge produced other ways; practical and wise—more justice hopefully-democracy? Increasing the importance of us all we do because our words work always and otherwise: cultural pluralism, heterogeneity and inclusion again and again and again. Appelbaum’s next book was called *The Delay of the Heart* (2001). I love that title. I will try. Translating theory into practice ... Theory and practice that is, theory/practice—*theoprax*. Always a fresh start, a fresh writing or new heteroglossia always, and through what I know and therefore don’t know because I must not. And you.

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