

MEET THE PHALLIC TEACHER: DESIGNING CURRICULUM AND IDENTITY IN A NEOLIBERAL IMAGINARY

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Abstract

This paper introduces the concept of the phallic teacher, a spectral figure that needs to be negotiated in teachers' everyday work and in school-based disciplinary communities of practice. Reporting the findings of a three year doctoral study completed in 2014, the paper looks closely at how English teachers design both curriculum and identity in an environment where feminist and poststructuralist work of the late 20th century seems to have lost traction.

These observations are based on empirical research in a Victorian school, combined with autoethnographic writing and other materials connecting teachers' and researchers' lives to the broader cultural postfeminist debate. The paper makes room for an absent subject, the teacher, marginalised in neoliberal discourses of curriculum and critiques the masculinist hegemony of outcomes and standards-based education. This provides us with new ways to challenge increasingly dominant current paradigms and to conceptualise a different future in which the standpoints of teachers are privileged in curriculum theory and curricular innovation.

Introducing the study

The image of the phallic teacher invokes girls' studies in order to think about curriculum design in Australia and provides gender-related concepts for exploring recent changes to teachers' work and lives. In 2012 I worked with Year 7 Humanities/English teachers Anne, Elinor, Rachel, Jess and Zoe at Haslemere College (pseudonyms are used here for teachers and school), a Victorian private co-educational secondary school, to create curriculum and reflect on this process. We contemplated using girls' popular culture in the classroom and so I read widely in this field. As I recorded and transcribed our meetings, we also shared emails and telephone conversations. I wrote a research journal and kept a visual diary- a collection of found images related to my research, often from popular culture; these strategies linked our curricular deliberations with broader cultural contexts, and also, in an autoethnographic sense, with what was taking place in my own life, as mother, doctoral student, lecturer and artist. My goal here was to think of creating and collecting materials as a "field of play" (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008) and to move beyond the collection of "data" from "subjects" to a more post-qualitative paradigm (St Pierre, 2014) in which we might think about how we make curriculum.

The work of cultural theorist Angela McRobbie, in particular *The aftermath of feminism: gender, culture and social change* (2009), assisted us with pedagogy around girls' texts and also suggested a kind of spectral figure emerging from the study, a figure that I call the phallic teacher. This figure, glimpsed in a paragraph here, a comment there, or an image every few pages, is the aspect of the broader study I seek to introduce in this paper. This is an image that flickers though the policy landscape of standards-based English education, a landscape that has been more fully defined and critiqued elsewhere (Parr & Bulfin, 2015) but which might also be described as a postfeminist neoliberal imaginary, an idealized space in which empowerment insists on compliance and the renunciation of former freedoms.

The phallic girl

McRobbie describes the phallic girl as a potential conceptual frame, a "technology" in the language of Michel Foucault, or a "luminosity" in the language of Gilles Deleuze, made available to young women as part of a new sexual contract. Signing this contract, young women are endowed with "the capacity to become phallus bearers as a kind of licensed mimicry of their male counterparts" (McRobbie, 2009,

p. 83): as in the phenomenon of the ladette. This is seen to take place in the contested landscape of postfeminism, where according to McRobbie, feminism is made irrelevant and seen to have achieved its goals. This is the same political environment in which neoliberal imperatives such as governmentality, instrumentality and meritocracy are dominant, and gender equality is absent as a curriculum priority. In education, this new “common sense” (Hall & Massey, 2010, p. 57), means that curriculum policy and inquiry do not employ language or patterns of thought that question dominant perspectives or imagine alternatives (Joseph, 2012, p. 21), the nature of knowledge is not questioned (Yates & Collins, 2010) and curriculum is defined as neutral, as “the defined and mandated set of knowledge and skills that schools are required to teach and assess” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2012). Teachers themselves become “neutral” participants (Apple, 2004, p. 10) in a vision of education that has been critiqued as pursuing a limited neoliberal agenda defining students as future capital for labour markets (Reid, 2010).

This is in stark contrast to earlier feminist and poststructuralist writing, in which the ideological power of curriculum was critiqued (Walkerdine, 1990; Davies, 1994) and teachers were recognized as embodied, especially in relation to gender (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). While “neutrality” is not how the teachers with whom I researched experience their practice, the study suggests how contemporary teaching requires constant hegemonic negotiation of this imaginary. As Anne, one of the teachers at Haslemere, says; “It’s finding your way through expectations and demands and still having a purposeful, exciting and constructive time with your class”.

McRobbie perceives cultural forces of re-traditionalisation undoing feminism, through an apparently progressive focus on the compulsively self-assessing, self-improving individual (2009, p. 43), a person like Anne, perhaps, who must deal with new “expectations and demands”. As the study evolved, I began to perceive a form of phallicism, or the worship of the phallus, as a technology or luminosity also available to teachers as the Australian national curriculum, potentially a self-assessment tool for teachers, is introduced. Anne says, of the technical language structuring the descriptors of the Australian Curriculum: English:

It'd be nice to have some joy in the experience. Look at this: 'Understand and explain how the text structures and the language features of texts become more complex [brief hiatus] ... underst... ident... underlying structures such as taxonomies such as cause and effect, extended metaphor'. It's just so... It's... It's... so [draws word out] crushing.

What if this technical language is one of a range of phallic tools that teachers are required to take up, to step into the light of success, to mimic the “masculine” world of managerialism? To be successful, teachers need to use these tools, both on themselves and on their students. Looking back over my research journal, I write of rubrics, criteria, outcomes, standards, benchmarks. My seven year old son comes home at the end of every week with his DOJO results, a score out of 100. His every classroom action is monitored and assessed so that he might gain virtual dollars towards a purchased reward. In his school’s education committee meetings I watch multiple abacus diamonds on NAPLAN graphs, or NAPLAN numbers, red and green, stop and go. My son’s prospective secondary schools demand his NAPLAN results and I feel guilty that I withdrew him from the tests.

At university I hear pre service teachers report that their supervisors insist they write lesson outlines on their boards on entering the classroom. They must not deviate from these plans. They must never commence a lesson any other way. A placement school hands out the year’s curriculum on a CD-ROM and students log on each lesson to do the work. At a conference, I listen to teachers describe exemplary practice: in a flexible learning space, it is too noisy if students talk, so they sit in silent hubs, communicating online, with every utterance monitored and filed. On my desk sits a marking sheet for a 3500 word essay; there are 80 criteria to tick against. Meanwhile, performance pay comes and goes and comes again in the media; teachers stand outside the school gates to deliver their pamphlets. Other parents cannot understand why anyone would argue with performance pay- don’t we want quality teachers?

The phallic teacher

All this coalesces in the description I write of a teacher presenter at a subject association day introducing the national curriculum:

The next speaker, an English teacher, is precision groomed, in a sharp suit, lipstick and killer heels. She stumbles as she climbs up to the podium. She seems uncertain, a doll, a robot. Her words are someone else's, she speaks in the halting manner of a tourist with a phrase book. Her presentation demonstrates 'absolute whole school consistency of practice that is data driven'. She assures us 'we are shifting the existing data to move our targets forwards'. A curriculum mapping software program has glammed up her PowerPoint graphs of student achievement: apparently 'stakeholders' like this approach.

It has been proposed that teachers, in a feminised profession, were once addressed, or interpellated (Althusser, 1971; Butler, 1997), as “selfless paragons of service” (Weber and Mitchell, 1995, p. 130). What if contemporary teachers, men and women, are addressed as McRobbie’s “assemblages of productivity” (2009 p. 85)? While there are other critiques, for example of a teacher ethics of competition contrasted with a former ethics of professional judgement (Ball, 2003), of activist versus entrepreneurial teacher identities (Sachs, 2003) or teacher femininities reconfigured by the promotion of competition and individualism in the classroom (Reay 2001), these do not specifically locate this shift in a postfeminist landscape in which teachers of all genders are called on to become phallic teachers. While the phallic teacher has been envisaged before (for example by Jagodzinski, 2002, p. 33), here the trope appears in the context of an entanglement with postfeminism.

An understanding of certain curricular orientations ascribed by culture to a gender binary is fully realised in Madeline Grumet’s work, in which she defines masculine tools to include competency based testing, the back-to-basics movement, teacher accountability, and bureaucracy and rationalisation as enacted in schools; she sees a masculine approach as “a defined progression towards an end product” (1988, p. 24). While Grumet sees the rise of this “masculine” drive in education as a backlash against the 1960s, its reinstatement might today be seen as part of a postfeminist movement, in which gender norms are reinscribed. This linear approach drives Ralph Tyler (1949) style curriculum theory and has colonised Australian classrooms, including Haslemere College, in the form of backwards design, and its definition of teaching as “a means to an end” (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005, p. 19).

So have teachers negotiated a new contract, in which they take up the phallus, adopt the masculine tools of mandated curriculum, the ACELA1234s, the codes, the templates, the rubrics, in exchange for relinquishing other forms of power, other ways of being? “We are not here to critique this,” says a teacher at the national curriculum presentation I describe above. Instead, we are required to *deliver*; we move from a mode of critical reflection, political engagement and recognition of the ideological nature of teachers’ work, to a mode of delivery, greasing machinery moving forwards, always. As I write this, today’s newspaper headline reads “NAPLAN: Education chief warns students not improving” (Smith & Cook, 2015): teachers are not phallic enough, they are failing to progress. The phallic teacher ideal is the performing teacher, the quality teacher, the teacher who has ever more students meeting outcomes, who steps forward eagerly into the light of NAPLAN and league tables. This teacher is even grateful, as McRobbie (2009, p. 27) suggests of young women in Britain, for parameters dressed up as freedoms, in this case by the national curriculum. Zoe, the youngest teacher in our study says:

In New South Wales, because I'm trained in New South Wales, the curriculum's much more specific about what we must teach. So when I came to Victoria, I thought, 'How do they decide what they want to teach?' I'm trained in SOSE [Studies of Society and Environment], so they say in Geography you must teach hurricanes, cyclones, whatever it is, they're very specific. But in Victoria they'll just say Natural Disasters. And I've noticed that the schools that I've been teaching at, everyone does it differently and it's like some of the schools, not this one thank God, don't even really refer back to the curriculum, because they've just interpreted it however they want. [several people talk over each other]

In less than a generation it has become radical to conceive that teachers themselves might have once decided what to teach. Yet Zoe also writes to me that she is as frustrated as her colleagues about ‘the

limitations of the new curriculum in terms of the texts we must teach at each year level,' demonstrating the fluidity of these positions, and the complex ways they may be taken up and resisted by individuals. These different identities are performed in the space of curriculum design within this community of practice, and inevitably affect the performative pedagogical imagination, in which we imagine ourselves either doing, or failing to do, a 'good job' in the classroom. What is 'a good job'? Are we activists, or reliable implementers, from one moment to the next? Is our work redolent with politics and the personal, or professionally neutral? How do we cope with the 'bifurcated consciousness' described by Dorothy Smith (1987, p. 16), in which governmental ruling relations of the workplace meet the messiness of life experience? Jess says the following in a long email after our first meeting, in which we talked about our own memories of girls' media:

Anne commented on how our session brought up nostalgia/a personal element. I am conscious of not letting this cloud what we're wanting to achieve with the students. I am conscious of bringing my own personal 'stuff' to the classroom. Maybe this is a good thing, maybe not, can the two really be separated? Who knows...

The phallic teacher works with clean binaries: work/home, personal/professional, failure/success, school/community. We must now worry about whether we can similarly bifurcate, a time consuming self-evaluation that limits more creatively reflexive and fluid understandings of teaching.

Woolly teaching

At the presentation I describe above, another teacher advises me that a standardised curriculum design format (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005) had addressed 'woolly teaching' at her school; this is an ironic figurative counterpoint to the imaginative daydreaming of 'wool-gathering' that might lead to traditional versions of creativity and illustrates the binary that has evolved between 'the old ways' (those of the creative, charismatic teacher enacting the pedagogy of personal growth) and the new, with managerialist processes forming skills-based curriculum tied to dominant political discourses.

I link this woolly metaphor of out-of-dateness to Anne's descriptions of herself as a 'dyed-in-the-wool' feminist and her students' perceptions of gender activism as a 'knitting circle'. Merriam-Webster's definition of 'woolly' includes 'lacking in clearness or sharpness of outline', 'mental confusion' and 'lack of order or restraint' (2014); these are qualities abhorred by neoliberalism, with its shininess and sharp corners, and also qualities of the natural world so often aligned with the feminine. Outside of the meetings, one of the teachers tells me about the students' desire to celebrate Movember, but not International Women's Day. She uses the word 'cringe' to describe their response to the latter: a physical, whole body spasm of revulsion. In the staffroom, teachers take me aside and tell me about a former student who was victimised for her feminism and struggled with subsequent shame and despair.

Teachers and melancholy

This brings to mind another invocation of performance, not that of workplace productivity but Judith Butler's work on identity as gendered performance, and on the melancholy inherent in the renunciation of homosexuality (2007). McRobbie sees an echo of Butler's melancholy in young women's renunciation of feminism (2009) and Peter Taubman uses Butler to define teachers in neoliberal times as "melancholics under the sign of audit" (2011, p. 170). If we merge these interpretations, we might perceive all teachers grieving the mandated renunciation of the "feminine" in our professional identities and pedagogies. The phallic teacher, like the phallic girl, must grieve what she or he renounces.

This might also be perceived in other literature, for example in Misty Adoniou's study (2012) of recently qualified teachers leaving the profession when their pastoral instincts clash with neoliberal imperatives, and in moments during the study, when Elinor casts her arm in a wide arc, a gesture of loss, mimicking the way her students now throw away their work- it is all exam practice, there is nothing in which they have anything of themselves invested, unlike in the days of the creative Writing Folio, now defunct as it proved too "woolly", too difficult to assess and authenticate. Melancholy

transmuted into McRobbie's "illegible rage" (2009, p. 94) may drive the smash of Elinor's hand on the table as she says "the battle is not won" after describing a male student calling a teacher a "retarded chick". In our meetings we see flashes of this melancholic rage underneath acquiescence or humour, in Rachel's insistence to the younger teachers, beyond what is socially comfortable, that we do not have equal pay for equal work, and in the mashing of Barbie's feet on the table, when we demonstrate how she cannot stand up. Anne describes, sadly but with resignation, how male staff respond to her attempts to speak about gender issues in the school:

At the Gender Equity Committee, the moment I talk about it, there is just this turn off. Turn the volume down. Get her off. [shouts the last]

There is also melancholy in the way Elinor reports her students' reactions to the trials of former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard:

Her speech 'I will not be lectured.....' became a byword for them. And it wasn't challenged within the school (read male students); their anger was too palpable. 'She's just a feminist,' was finally met by, 'Yeah, and so am I!' Her interview with Anne Summers set off the talk again, but this time the talk was grief... 'Look what they did to her...' (subtext – and got away with).

As Grumet (1988) points out, education is not separate from the world in which, largely, men establish government policy and women teach children; this remains relevant even 17 years later, as I watch teacher graduands walk across the stage, girl after girl, stumbling in heels. In my journal I write:

Lunch time. Canberra, our capital city, the seat of our government, on TV. Prime Minister Julia Gillard is involved in a scuffle with Aboriginal activists. She loses a shoe (high heeled blue suede wedge) and is half dragged, half carried to a car by her security detail... Not long after, she falls out of a shoe on her way up to a podium. Then on an official visit to New Delhi, she loses a heeled shoe in turf and falls, spreadeagled, to the ground, to the delight, again, of the world's media. For men who get to wear flat heels all day every day, she tells them, if you wear a heel it can get embedded in soft grass. Then the article says, "The PM is due to hold talks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and a series of bilateral meetings with Indian ministers later today", as an afterthought.

In my visual diary there are pictures of Tony Abbott in front of a picture of a witch, of effigies of Margaret Thatcher burnt in the streets, and of president Barbie, the ultimate girls' idol. Julia Gillard must walk McRobbie's "thin tightrope" (2009, p. 84), she must "perform masculinity without relinquishing the femininity which makes [her] so desirable to men". Similarly, teachers are invited to perform the power licensed by the neoliberal reform, or "deform" as it is also described (Pinar, 2011), while remaining subservient to it, and appropriately deferential.

At Haselmere, according to the teachers, there are only two girls in the Year 12 Physics class. Girls do not go on the surfing camp. Female teachers and students feel intimidated using the school gym. Girls are "playing dumb" in class, to minimise the threat their participation in education poses to boys. This, from Gillard to the gym, is the postfeminist landscape in which girls identifying as feminist risk ridicule. McRobbie proposes that the new female subject is called upon to remain silent and withhold critique, in order to count as a modern, sophisticated girl (2009). This may also be the case for the modern, professional teacher, who is silenced in relation to concerns about technology, for example, or standardised testing, or performance pay, or, of course, gender issues. The professionalising, whether of girl, Gillard or teacher, is accompanied by "punitive conditions" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 56).

In the course of the study, I have come to see the dominance of neoliberal discourse in education as part of a much deeper and wider re-entrenchment of patriarchal control of a feminised profession, a site of influence, where teachers imagine future subjectivities and potentially bring alternative visions to pass. This takes place in a culture-at-large in which women, in the highest of offices, are reviled and belittled. It seems more than a coincidence that gender critique falls away, or focuses on masculinities via the "boy turn" (Weaver-Hightower, 2003), just as a masculinised, suited-up, technology-driven and corporate performativity steps forward to sell the national curriculum. In my visual diary I have photographs of the men in suits who speak on the ACARA website, or represent the new curriculum on the speaking circuit, who speak of their desire for mandated curriculum to mould a teacher body

that is compliant and ever better performing (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). Anne describes this address when she says of national curriculum documents:

I feel that the teacher is kind of being chided, I guess, with the limitation of what they would do if we didn't give you all this breadth. That you would just, I don't know, make paper chains in class or s... it seems like they're saying that you need to teach this and this and this and this and this, kind of implying you wouldn't be using your time wisely if... if you weren't given these guidelines and I think, well, one of the things I'm worried about in our race to tick all the boxes we won't actually teach. We'll touch on... or perhaps it's not so much that we won't have the time to teach, we won't have the time to learn. [Lots of "mms" in the background through this].

Concurrently, the gender pay gap widens, and domestic violence makes daily headlines. In my journal, I quote from the morning's paper:

As the nation celebrates International Women's Day, thousands of Victorian families continue to live in terror with new police data revealing an alarming increase in the number of death threats made, predominantly by men, against former partners.

(Butt & Houston, 2014, p. 12)

This suggests that feminism, far from being successful and no longer needed, is sidelined for what McRobbie describes as the "vengeful" reinstatement of gender norms in postfeminism (2009, p. 55) disguised in the form of an "urging to agency" (2009, p. 83) for both the phallic girl, and the phallic teacher.

Critiquing the phallic girl

McRobbie's invocation of the postfeminist phallic girl has been critiqued for, ironically, a monolithic construction of neoliberalism (Newman, 2013), for focusing on the textual rather than empirical (Hey, 2010) and for essentialising patriarchy (McRobbie, 2015). Aware of these perspectives, I have been careful to cast addresses to teachers as attempts to interpellate, not as *faits accomplis*, to incorporate the words and experiences of teacher collaborators and to resist locating patriarchy in any particular place. The phallic teacher emerges as a trope to think with, to meet figuratively. No teacher I know is a "phallic teacher". Yet all the teachers involved in the study speak of negotiating discourses that define the phallic teacher as an ideal in contrast to themselves, located in a position other than where they want to be, which is "where students are at". The teachers themselves describe this "ideal" when I ask them who they feel the national curriculum addresses.

*Lucinda: [shows ACARA website] Who is the person you think this website is addressing?
[laughter]*

Rachel: Someone who has no choice. [laughter]

Anne: Someone without a life.

Jess: People who have to.

Lucinda. This is for me now, for my purposes. Can you draw the person... maybe you don't need to draw the person...?

Elinor: Middle aged, female, super conscientious... [weary drawl]

This is not a teacher who will complicate the classroom with the personal, with woolly thinking or troublesome activism. The phallic teacher is also present in government documents, elided by the passive voice, but the conduit for delivery of the curriculum. 'Curriculum will be designed to develop successful learners' (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 13), we are told. I seek to emphasise here the simultaneity of the call to be successful and the construction of teacher as "absent subject" (Smith, 1987, p. 175), a discursive marginalisation that disempowers even as it purports to empower.

Negotiating the call

So how do teachers within a community of practice negotiate this ambiguous call to be the phallic teacher? Anne, Elinor, Rachel, Jess and Zoe provide an example, when they tell me, unfortunately but not coincidentally after the recorder is turned off, about how they went about their national curriculum audit. They sat down after school together, outside of compulsory time, with glasses of wine and highlighters, to laugh and take up this fluorescent, hegemonic challenge- they mime whipping through the documents, highlighters flashing, simultaneously performing compliance and subversion, in a carnivalesque celebration of solidarity and miscreance. In the visual diary I have a photograph of Miley Cyrus, who has been mentioned in our planning meetings, flaunting a phallic drink can, complying and resisting, manipulated and manipulator.

In art we find other examples of negotiating the power of the phallus- I am familiar with these images though my background in Fine Arts, and collect examples in my visual diary. In art there is play across rigid borders, blurring of heteronormative masculine and feminine identities. Artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe, Louise Bourgeois, Sarah Lucas and Naomi Eller suggest how we can play with the phallus, rather than allowing it to control us, offering ways to deal with, for example the marking sheet with 80 criteria. Lucas exaggerates the phallus to the extent that we have to point and laugh, installing organs as large as cars in gallery spaces. As our parents may have told us, in relation to dealing with the stranger who exposes his genitals to us, that nothing detumesces like laughter. So when the criterion sheet crosses our desk, we might laugh, and say, "This is ridiculous!" and refuse to use it, then also in a defiant act of radical molecular feminism (McRobbie 2015), share this rebuff on social media, so that one voice becomes many. This new social incarnation of feminism is one McRobbie acknowledges in her latest work, updating her predictions of the utter demise of feminism for the phallic girl.

Art also teaches us how more fluid and complicated hermaphrodite visions might incorporate the phallus without dominance, via sculptures with protuberances and crevices, sharp and rounded shapes, other kinds of balanced power, that we might evolve with and critique. We might design curriculum with the exquisite modulation of Eller's tableaux, in which phalluses and pelvises are imaginatively intertwined. We might keep the drive of the phallus in check, as Bourgeois does in Mapplethorpe's photograph of her in a shaggy coat, holding her sculpture *Fillette* tucked cheekily under her arm, a warning fingernail poised against the glans (Kuspit, 2008).

The teachers at Haslemere, however, are the first to model this approach to me. When I first talk to Anne about the study, she tells me firmly that for them, the national curriculum is "there"- with the emphasis in her voice she both acknowledges it and figuratively sets it aside, tucks it away- but she and her fellow teachers like to start with the students, and what they want students to do and be.

At school, we might also re-embrace woolliness, the "fuzzy thinking" Elinor refers to, as she describes thinking through curriculum herself, rather than getting it from a website, welcome emotion, mystery, affect, imagination, privacy, spontaneity and ambiguity. We might teach texts because we love them, not because they are on lists, or fulfil requirements. We might refuse to allow our language to be co-opted, to be made reductive, resisting sentences like the following example, noted in my diary from a subject association journal:

If you are lucky a text ticks off both the Asian and Indigenous work requirements.

When we speak or write like this, we perform the phallic teacher. Instead we might negotiate curriculum with students (Boomer, 1992). Reclaiming the reciprocity of the classroom, remembering that we do more than deliver, more than ejaculate into space, reconfigures the phallic teacher, makes this spectre more wisp than overlord. We need this reconfiguration for a future in which education may become increasingly structured with binary code, teacher-proofed and technologically delivered (Selwyn, 2011). We could challenge the "stream of incitements and enticements to engage in a range of specified practices" (McRobbie 2009), often technological, that might otherwise erode activist professional integrity. The proposed marking of NAPLAN literacy scripts by computers comes to

mind here. We might subvert the preoccupation with self-regulation, with recording every minute of professional learning, with constantly recreating ourselves as flexible subjects capable of infinite improvement (Walkerline & Ringrose, 2006). We might celebrate the messiness and unpredictability of teaching, complicating backwards design and recognising pedagogy as “relational, emergent and non-linear” (Sellars in Green, 2010, p. 10).

We might participate in collaborative projects such as STELLA2.0 (Parr & Bulfin, 2015), which listen to the voices of teachers or share individual performance plans with colleagues, or fill them in together, with wine and highlighters, using “we” not “I”. We might write the lesson outline on the board, then draw a bright line through it and do something else entirely. We might re-engage with critique of the outcomes-based approach that has become common sense (for example McKernan, 2008). Such ordinary activities dress themselves up today as subversion, as we feel impelled to phallicism.

Conclusion: an interdisciplinary contribution

In this paper, thinking with ideas from girls’ studies, I seek to make a contribution to “resisting the rage for clarity and closure emanating from policy and pedagogy” (MacLure, 2003, p. 170) in contemporary curriculum theory. I model here dimensions of thinking about curriculum design that privilege varied teacher standpoints and also conceptualise these as involving what happens beyond the classroom, outside boundaries of clarity and closure, in stark contrast to the phallic teacher reading off outcomes from her script.

One afternoon at Haslemere College, Anne suggests I should watch a TED talk (How Fiction Can Change Reality) on reading that she finds inspiring, a talk which uses a constantly evolving and changing journey metaphor quite unlike the tick boxes; the languid animation is completely at odds with competition, and watching, we find ourselves in unexpected places. Anne is motivated by passion for a discipline and the unmeasurable, transformative powers of literature, rather than by students achieving skill-based outcomes. ‘Why can’t the curriculum be more like this?’ she asks, hoping for a better alignment of authoritative and personal discourses. Meeting, acknowledging and resisting the spectre of the phallic teacher may help us find an answer to this question and reconnect us with other possibilities, beyond the freedom to excel at a corporate version of compliance, a freedom licensed by our acquiescence to education’s own postfeminist contract.

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