

**Mutuality or monopoly:  
Reflections on the Ethics of International Curriculum Work  
J. Gregory Keller  
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis**

I begin with the assumption that those who read this have an interest in issues of context on two levels – that of cultural and social specificity and that of common interests across those specificities. When we address context, we always begin with at least the previously mentioned two levels before us, which I will designate for the sake of this discussion as the local and the cosmopolitan. Another important bit of context lies in a central issue of concern: I will be talking about *ethics*<sup>1</sup> in relation to a local/multi-local and cosmopolitan setting and I will be discussing ethics in relation to one specific arena of human activity: work with academic curricula in an international setting.

Turning then to the local: As I write these words I sit in a coffee shop in the U.S. Midwest. I bring to this moment my inner life of psyche and community, my relationships to those I address and to many others over time and space, my bodily life of this moment and of past and presumably future, and a setting of physical and social structures including many other human beings and human artifacts at an intersection of nature and culture. We could of course spend our time together spinning out the specifics of this context in its many ramifications but that would obscure our larger purpose. Nevertheless if we entirely fail to address the multiple intersecting lines of context that surround our conversation something important will also be obscured. I consider myself in this moment to stand at the intersection of the absolutely local and the inevitably cosmopolitan truth of my humanity in the long and winding road that always leads back to the Cosmos amidst our particularity and to singularity in the midst of the Cosmos. No human work stands as foreign to these contextual issues; academic curricula are part of a particular context in human life and in the life of humanity, and perhaps in the life of the Cosmos

Extending the local/cosmopolitan in one fruitful direction then I seek here to address a question: how might we understand the ethical issues and dilemmas of international curriculum work? Many paths might be followed in answer to this question. I suggest, however, limiting ourselves to the following: Foucault's ideas of relations of power, games of truth, and practices of the self, especially as they bear on his ideas of dialogue and polemics (2003 a); Gadamer's notion of a fusion of horizons or meeting of worlds in our interactions with one another (1991); and Levinas's account of the levels of dialogic possibility in our encounters with the other.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I will be using 'ethics' in general as it is often used in philosophy to stand for 'moral philosophy' or the more theoretical aspects of discussions of human conduct and obligation; I will generally use 'moral' or 'morality' for talk concerning practices, principles, and rules. The two terms are sometimes used interchangeably in ordinary discourse and at times the distinction will blur in my discussion due to the close connections between theory and practice in human affairs.

<sup>2</sup> One might ask, why Foucault, Gadamer, and Levinas rather than others, such as, e.g., Rawls, Appiah, Sen, or Nussbaum? The first order answer is that the ideas of the chosen thinkers lend a particular point of view on dialogue that I wish to make use of here. This in no way is meant to indicate that alternative approaches would lack value; they would simply point in other directions and leave us with very different ways of viewing the issue.

### *Three Dimensions of Experience and the Fusion of Experience*

I begin then with three dimensions of experience drawn from Foucault: power and truth and practice/self (Foucault, 2003a, 2003b). Every action defines a relation of power – to act is to extend one’s power; every sharing of ideas defines a game of truth – no matter how subjective I believe my ideas to be they reveal particular possibilities of the way the world is and works and potential means for investigating those ways; every action and every sharing participates in a set of practices – every move I make in acting or sharing defines or extends, troubles or continues *my* subjectivity as well as possible modes of *human* subjectivity.

If I bring my knowledge of curriculum or methods to someone from another cultural or social context, I am immediately immersed in dilemmas of particularity. The singular context in which an approach ‘works’ might undermine attempts to generalize. Awareness of this problem often leads researchers to seek more transferable modes of knowledge gathering. Such concerns result for some in a strong emphasis on quantitative methods, for as we all know numbers do not lie. Equally, however, the same concerns lead some to qualitative methods, since such methods seek to overcome the mind-numbing effect of numbers that provide alleged truth untouched by subjectivity while merely masking the subjective within a seemingly objective coating – image is after all everything. In the final analysis of course one cannot escape the local and particular, with every claim bearing only its measure of truth, needing deep and careful placement and likely regular re-placement in the specifics from which it arises.

One key to sharing our insights lies in recognizing our positionality and working hard at grasping helpful ways to generalize, fallibly but without a numbingly strong emphasis on uncertainty. Ethics sprouts from the facts of our locality and also from our cosmopolitanism (read here as simply our humanity)<sup>3</sup> and from the matrix in which the two meet. Curriculum work in every instance arises as an ethical act – an act of meaning and purpose; it unfolds as an aim for the apparent good. The internationalizing of our work bears an additional weight of morality, since it lies at the axis of our will to share our understanding with those whose life seems strange to us and of our will to impose our will on those who seem less or needy or oppressed (sometimes based on our actions themselves). We might, for instance, take as examples differing notions of democracy (Mason) and differing notions of what it means to be Macedonian (Helfenbein). When we enter the field of discussion, we bring with us certain well-formed and often very particularized or localized ideas and ideals of what happens and what should happen in the classroom and in the larger environment affecting and being affected by the classroom experience.

---

The general theoretical point to be drawn lies in the very nexus of ideas we are addressing: each choice relates to one’s local situatedness and to one’s embeddedness in the whole of things. No decision to make use of a particular set of thinkers or ideas is absolute or final and none is without some relevance, more or less direct, more or less tenuous.

<sup>3</sup> I do not intend to enmesh this discussion in the current confusions over the notion of the cosmopolitan/human, using the idea simply as a place marker for that which is more than local, which we can perhaps share through our humanity. For interesting recent discussion of issues in this realm see Dallmayr (2003), Jabri (2007), Jordaán (2009), and Godrej (2009).

These further raise the specter of imposing one's own cultural values on others versus, and here's the rub, finding some common ground for mutuality.<sup>4</sup>

The question "What is Macedonia?", for example, (Helfenbein) allows the researcher to find ways not primarily to impose his view of another's world but to begin instead with the opening of potentially fruitful dialogue. Dialogue is only fruitful, however, if it begins with an acknowledgement of one's own openness and ignorance (see Plato 2001, Foucault 2003a, Gadamer 1991, Levinas 1998). The complexity of response cannot be appreciated if I lead with my own certainty about the other and his or her space, culture, and needs. Similarly, a discussion of social studies as a part of the curriculum in Latvia (Mason) cannot even get under way if we believe ourselves to have the only available approach. These examples may seem like commonplaces to us; we might say that of course we must begin thus, but the ethics of international curriculum work lies not just in acknowledging the obviousness of our limited view or our particularity. It involves a depth of wonder and of conscious reassessment that will keep us aware as we move forward of those less obvious possibilities we might fail to recognize.<sup>5</sup>

In light then of our need to approach our work under an awareness of the intersection of ethical theory and practice, I offer in what follows four paradigmatic approaches to the dialogic ethics of international curriculum work: the basic 'not knowing' of Socrates, "elements of experience" and principles of dialogue from Foucault, Gadamer's notion of a "fusion of horizons" and of the importance of dialogue in our interpretive endeavors, and levels of dialogic recognition presented in Levinas.

The initial ethical act of sharing from our local/cosmopolitan selves involves a willingness to engage in dialogue, a willingness to listen and to speak under the recognition of sameness and difference – a willingness that involves a practice of mutuality that opens upon the mystery of the unknown in ourselves and others. We never fully unravel this mystery, but need not then wallow in paralyzing uncertainty. Instead we develop practices of the dialectic of listening/speaking that undergird our practices of curriculum work, both in its inception and in our sharing of what we have learned. Socrates helpfully points to this dialectic when he announces that through questioning he found that artisans were wise and lacked wisdom at the same time. They were wise in their craft – as we might be in the craft of teaching/learning. They lacked wisdom in believing that their craft wisdom provided evidence of wisdom concerning the human condition in general.

When we bring our wisdom to others, we do well to participate in the wisdom of Socrates, a wisdom that begins with questions and never entirely leaves that beginning point. I might ask, what do I know that might be useful to another? What do I not know that might stand in the way of that usefulness? Then the questions are reversed. What do I know, or believe myself to know, that might stand in the way of benefit to others? What do I not know that, by leaving me open to learning, makes me a resource

---

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Gadamer (Vessey 2006) the meeting with another and its attendant mutuality implied by conversation.

<sup>5</sup> For an interesting assessment of the "reflexive distance that would enable agents as well as theorists to reexamine their modes of thought and behavior" (p. 266) see Kögler (1996).

for another? Such questions form a caldron within which our mutual benefit, learning, and development has an opportunity to steep, flavors mixing and enhancing one another so that the rich stew of our mutual learning can be served to any who seek it – although only deep participation will likely gain the full taste of that learning.

Socrates believed that the wisdom for which he was noted lay in nothing other than in his relentless, indeed ruthless commitment to questioning every idea, every belief, every assumption. That willingness to question requires of us a certain moral practice – we must lay aside our often unconscious tendency to hold our beliefs as part of ourselves and instead identify with the bare, ‘unencumbered’ questioner (contra Sandel 1984; see Villa 2001, p. 23). Socratic wisdom involves practicing certain ‘virtues’ in relation to ourselves (Foucault, 2003) and in relation to others (Gadamer 1991, Levinas 1998). Key virtues include the traditional ones of courage, integrity, and justice as well as more contemporary ones as described by Foucault (2003), Gadamer (1991), and Levinas (1998), such as the virtues of listening, questioning, and reciprocity (Foucault); fluidity, the value of the unexpected, and conversation as paradigm for learning (Gadamer); encounter that opens us to the other’s otherness, and the transcending of simple reciprocity through being faced by the priority of the other (Levinas). One key measure of adopting a Socratic approach to the ethics of international curriculum work is remembering the central intellectual virtue that he practiced in the form of questioning oneself and others (Plato, 2001, see also Gadamer’s discussion of “The Logic of Question and Answer”, 1991, pp. 369-379).

Thinking of international curriculum work in the context of ethics brings us an interesting question at the heart of both complex sets of possibilities: in participating in work across cultures we run the risk of imposing our foreign ‘horizon’ (Gadamer, 1991) on those with whom we work; in seeking to proceed ethically we run the risk of imposing an external, potentially foreign horizon or set of standards upon our work.<sup>6</sup> Let us seek to work out the implications of this parallel.

First, any imposition of the external points to the three dimensions we are borrowing from a late interview with Foucault (2003a), in which he speaks of “the three fundamental elements of any experience ...: a game of truth, relations of power, and forms of relation to oneself and to others” (p. 23); the last of which he also refers to as “practices of the self” (2003b, p. 34 and p. 40; see also Foucault 1990 and 2005; discussions and applications of Foucault’s notion of practices of the self include McLaren 2006; Crane, Knights, and Starkey 2008; and Loacker and Muhr 2009). We always engage in relations of power, which we can never avoid because of the nature of human relationships, but which vary greatly in value and in the level of awareness we bring to them. Bringing our approach to curriculum to others—most notably across cultures and borders—invariably involves an enmeshment in power relations; this fact seems obvious. What might be less obvious is the level of power relations implied by an attempt to discipline our actions and relationships on the basis of ethical standards. When we discipline ourselves according to ethical standards, we potentially impose on ourselves the influence of another or others

---

<sup>6</sup> We might look to Foucault, Butler, and Levinas on both sides of this issue in terms of subjugation and self-creation, performative aspects of identity, and the ethical relation with the other. For a helpful discussion of these ideas, see Loacker and Muhr (2009), esp. pp. 269-273.

whose power lies obscured by the fact that we have taken in as our own the ideas and practices involved; they do not seem external or foreign even though they do not originate with us. Similarly our attempts to influence others provide a parallel to our being influenced by those others who affect our practices, even if in neither case does the influence appear on the surface of the relationship. Both of these connections, however, tie us also to games of truth. What do I know and how have I come to know it, and in terms of my communicating my knowledge to others in what ways and by what means do I justify the claims I make (and how and to what extent does the power relation implied by my underlying assertion of authority play a role in my claims and their reception)? Similarly we might ask how I discover and maintain whatever ethical ideas I hope to impose on myself in this process. Clearly claims to truth play a significant role in my governing others or myself. How do I substantiate those claims and how are they enforced? Here we see the inter-relation of power and truth. The complex set of relationships surrounding our work also implies sets of practices of the self – how do I govern myself in offering expertise; how do others govern themselves in accepting, rejecting, or questioning my offered help; what role have my inner practices played in my believing I have something to offer and in my offering it the way I do?

One possible approach to offering my insights to another and to connecting with relevant ethical ideas lies in beginning with a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer 1991) rather than an imposition of the horizon of the one presenting the information. Gadamer speaks of the horizon of our point of view in the following way:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of “situation” by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of “horizon.” ... [W]orking out the hermeneutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter .... (p. 302)

Gadamer goes on to explain that the consciousness that properly works out this horizon of inquiry “has the structure of *experience*” (p. 346) and that the structure of experience ultimately involves reaching “an understanding in a dialogue ... [such that we are] transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were” (p. 379). Dialogue signals a willingness to discover commonalities in our differences and differences in our commonalities so that we reduce inappropriate power relations,<sup>7</sup> play a truth game with communal rules, and find or invent self practices that encourage mutuality rather than monopoly. Gadamer remarks that “When two people come together and enter into an exchange with one another, then there is always an encounter between, as it were, two worlds, two worldviews and two world pictures” (Vessey and Blauwkamp 2006, p. 354). In international work, in the interstices between the local and the cosmopolitan, and in ethics, in the complex plurality of choice and value, these encounters between worlds or horizons arise possibly as impassible barriers of inferiority/superiority or arise as invitations for learning through a dialogic fusion of horizons, a meeting of worlds.

---

<sup>7</sup> As Foucault points out, power relations, while a part of every human experience, can become ‘stuck’ and thus promote or simply become cases of domination (2003b, pp. 34-35).

Turning now to the ethical relation, we ask: do I bring to my work a system of categories lowered into place from without or do I discover an immanent interrelation of values that arises from within? The world has a long history of imposed values, such a lengthy series of impositions that it might be hard to imagine alternatives, but we must seek other paths if we are not to remain stuck in irreconcilable otherness. To cross the chasm of our difference we must at least seek common ground, *mutuality*, in recognizing the integral values that bind us together in our work for, with, and by one another. Of course there are numerous arguments back and forth concerning the very possibility of common ground. What I mean to address here is not by any means some form of return to foundationalism. It may be seen instead in terms of Gadamer's ideal of the meeting of worlds implied by engaging in conversation (Vessey and Blauwkamp 2006), possibly by a properly 'thin' version of Habermasian discourse ethics (Linklater 2005), or by some appropriately broadened version of dialogic cosmopolitanism (Jordaan 2009). Below we will also discuss a Foucauldian version of this idea in his discussion of the implicit rights of a person involved in dialogue.

Let us take as an example, then, of an internally arising set of ethical practices Foucault's description of dialogue in a late interview (2003a). He introduces a discussion of dialogue versus polemics by saying, "... there is a whole morality at stake, the one that concerns the search for truth and the relation to the other" (Foucault 2003a, p. 18). Here he sets out the three "elements of experience" (p. 23) in terms of a "morality" (practices of the self), a "search for truth" (a game of truth), and "the relation to the other" (relations of power) (p. 18). What most concerns us in this discussion lies in the way these practices, games, and relations are immanent in dialogue or polemics themselves. Concerning polemics, Foucault casts it in terms of a self-assertion that makes of the other "an adversary, an enemy who is wrong"; a game in which "his final objective will be not to come as close as possible to a difficult truth but to bring about the triumph of the just cause he has been manifestly upholding from the beginning"; and relations of power such that "he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that struggle a just undertaking" (p. 19). These aspects of polemics are not something added to the interaction by an outside judge or by the way society or others view it; they are intrinsic to polemics itself.

Similarly, dialogue encompasses certain rights shared by the participants based on the nature of dialogue itself, not added by an agreement between them or by anything about the local truths of those involved. Every dialogue, because it is a dialogue, is a "work of reciprocal elucidation." Foucault tells us that "the rights of each person are in some sense immanent in the discussion. They depend only on the dialogue situation" (2003a, p. 18). When we seek to share our knowledge, to practice a form of intervention in the lives and work of others, to take part in international curriculum work we may easily find ourselves caught between the undeniable attractions of polemics and the more subtle charms of dialogue. As human beings we can find both of these approaches calling out to us. As educators we can sometimes too easily imagine the appeal of standing in front of a group proclaiming our truth, ignoring voices of dissent because we know our cause is just. On the other hand we have likely been schooled in the advantages of mutuality, of listening and sharing, of a collaborative search for truth. It seems probable that most of us shuttle back and forth between a polemics and a more dialogic attitude.

Foucault's point, which I wish to stress, is that in their complete forms dialogue and polemics have an internal coherence that does not rely on a morality added from without. The morality of these two

forms of life with their inherent relations, games, and practices lies precisely in what they are in themselves. When I engage in dialogue I cannot but treat the other as a partner in a necessarily reciprocal act of elucidation. Equally when I engage in polemics I must treat the other as an enemy to be eliminated or at least subdued. Whichever activity I engage in brings with it a 'natural' morality, that is, a morality that lies in that form of life, that particular practice of self. It lies within the process I take on, not just in a moral code applied from the outside. The morality of dialogue or polemics, as discussed by Foucault, is an immanent morality.<sup>8</sup>

We can move then from this Foucauldian insight of the morality implicit in our connections with others to two other approaches, one attributable to Gadamer, the other to Levinas. Gadamer (1991) offers the metaphor of a 'fusion of horizons' (or "an encounter between, as it were, two worlds," Vessey and Blauwkamp 2006, p. 354) to explicate how we practice hermeneutics, that is, how we interpret texts, experiences, and communication. We can never wholly enter the world of another, whether in the form of a text or a person. On the other hand, through a consciousness of my own horizon of thought I can place my views in question at the same time as I question another by finding a point at which our horizons of understanding touch. In some ways of course I am always enclosed within the sphere of my own limited world yet the limits of that world can be transgressed by means of my interpretation of and my encounter with the world of another. "We say that we 'conduct' a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner" (Gadamer 1991, p. 383). Conversations in which we sincerely engage always extend us beyond our current limits and raise questions we could not have foreseen. The ethical dimension of Gadamer's claim lies in discovering either our willingness to accept and respond to the uncontrollable or our contrary intentions to attempt to maintain our power against the movement of conversation. He says that, "To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (1991, p. 379). It is this transformative potential that we either accept or reject in our approach to conversation with another.

### *Hermeneutic Dialogue and the Ethical Practice of the Self*

If we accept the invitation to genuine dialogue by which we may be changed and through which we may find ourselves called into question, we can turn to Gadamer's idea of the I-Thou aspect of hermeneutic dialogue in order to understand our relation to the other. Gadamer sees the interpretive act as following three lines of thought that run parallel in ways to Buber's idea of the I-Thou encounter.<sup>9</sup> Gadamer then distinguishes three forms of possible I-Thou relation: First, one listens and meets the other only for the sake of prediction and control, for the sake of an understanding of human nature or at least of this particular other in a way that allows one to remain clearly dominant in the relationship. In this case,

---

<sup>8</sup> Foucault says explicitly that "a whole morality is at stake" (1994, p. 18 "il y va de toute une morale", 1994, p. 591). 'Morality' functions here as a term for a set of practices, either polemical or dialogic. We could, in our own case, refer instead to an 'immanent ethics', meaning both a set of practices and its theoretical underpinnings.

<sup>9</sup> See Keller (2011) for a parallel discussion of the three approaches to the I-Thou relation in Gadamer.

then, we engage in international curriculum work on the basis primarily of enhanced power relations. As Gadamer points out, "From the moral point of view this orientation toward the Thou is purely self-regarding ..." (1991, p. 358). We could, for instance, administer questionnaires on views of democracy (see Mason, this volume) or discuss with a group whether one's own work is an incursion into their place and space (see Helfenbein, this volume) and yet, different from the authors, take the answers as merely information to be digested and used in a larger project of dominance. Given the history of colonial and imperial relationships, we are all familiar with this strategy. We may still need to consciously assess our work at times, nevertheless, to assure ourselves that we are not functioning in a "purely self-regarding" conversational approach to those we meet in our international work (and at home).

Second, one sees the other as person rather than object but responds to every word of the other with a counter-word, using the conversation as means of self-assertion or self-development. In this case, we believe we know the other better than she knows herself and thus we are not and cannot be disturbed by the other's words or presence. "By understanding the other, by claiming to know him, one robs his claims of their legitimacy. ... The claim to understand the other person in advance functions to keep the other person's claim at a distance. We are familiar with this from the teacher-pupil relationship ..." (1991, p. 360). This, Gadamer tells us, is in fact "the dialectical illusion of experience perfected and replaced by knowledge. ... The person who believes he is free of prejudices, relying on the objectivity of his procedures and denying that he is himself conditioned by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate him as a *vis a tergo* [a force acting from behind]" (p. 360). This is again a familiar enough notion, but note that this is a form of dialogue – a potentially ethical and mutual interaction. It can be entered into by us as though it were the dialogue envisioned by Foucault, in which we work together toward mutuality of understanding, toward mutuality of work, and toward mutuality of expression. In this case we might recognize ourselves perhaps in the classroom or in conversation with colleagues at home or abroad promoting a game of truth in which we believe ourselves to begin with the best cards or top strategy or sufficient knowledge with which we may win – as though this game were not a mutual play of ideas and practices but rather a secret but nevertheless serious, pure polemicism. In a case like this we listen to the other with apparent concern for his or her views but always only in order to defend or promote our own. No learning takes place; there is no room in this process for experience (*Erfahrung*) in Gadamer's sense of the idea.<sup>10</sup> We are again outside the realm of a genuine practice of mutuality. Even if we believe ourselves to hold significant truths that can be of value to others, when we play the game of truth this way, we focus not on mutuality but on asserting our power or rights.

Third, however, we might meet the other and truly listen, hearing the words and encountering the other in a way that puts our own ideas into question. Only this latter form of conversation has transformative potential, and indeed it is this form of interaction from which Gadamer draws his notion of experience

---

<sup>10</sup> "Every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation" (1991, p. 356). "Thus experience is experience of human finitude" (p. 357). "Genuine experience is experience of one's own historicity" (p. 357).



as disturbing, as a form of genuine dialogue, as a logic of question and answer (1991, pp. 370-372)<sup>11</sup> that requires and in fact *is* radical openness. “In human relations the important thing is ... to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. But ultimately this openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open” (1991, p. 361).

A key ethical question for those who would engage with another lies in our willingness or lack thereof to engage in ‘true’ speaking and listening – speaking and listening in order to experience the other and to be surprised and opened by both sides of that process.<sup>12</sup> We here have the possibility of moving past a contrived form of truth game into an encounter by which we are transformed. In such an event we offer the other something more than techniques, methods, approaches, or past learning. We offer ourselves. We do so genuinely, however, only by means of an ethical practice of the self, of “forms of relation to oneself and to others” (Foucault 2003, p. 23), through an encounter that meets the other without dismissal, dogmatism, or denial of their otherness and of the opacity of alterity, i.e. the fact that we cannot fully measure or control our difference from one another. The burden then of an ethics of international curriculum work lies in recognizing the forms of discourse in which we are engaged as well as in a sincere attempt to encounter the other in midst of the practical issues raised by the structures through which we meet.

Levinas (1998a) famously points to the further limits of our rationalizing of our relations, of our using or perhaps being used by Reason to construct and maintain a level of certainty and a policing of boundaries that eliminates alterity. Any move that eradicates difference, perhaps in the name of dialogue or care or help – solicited or not – or domestication or even revolution, any such weeding out of our radical alterity may make us feel duly philanthropic but it always leaves a desert in its wake.<sup>13</sup> Levinas will tell us that we cannot stand on our good intentions (or our mixed or uncertain ones), producing a homogeneity or reciprocity that in the end means nothing other than our domination over the other. Radical dialogue ends in recognition of our ineradicable debt to the other. Neither Foucauldian dialogue nor a Gadamerian fusion of horizons dissolves the fundamental significance of difference.

---

<sup>11</sup> Gadamer (1991) pp. 370-372 makes reference concerning the logic of question and answer to Collingwood (1939). For further elaboration of this idea see Collingwood (1940).

<sup>12</sup> Compare Levinas: “[The person] surrenders himself further when he expresses himself; ... the *Saying (Dire)* is an opening .... Prior to discourse, I am clothed in a form; I *am* where my being hides me. To speak is to break this capsule of the form and to surrender oneself” (1998b, p. 89). The role of the listener is reflected more fully in the following: “This is not a situation in which *one* poses the question; it is the question that takes hold of you: there you are brought into question” (p. 85). In encounter, both speaker and listener are (potentially) opened to the other, to experience that is not simply a continuation of the same.

<sup>13</sup> It’s interesting to note a comment by Gadamer to the effect that “the dialectic of charitable or welfare work operates this way, penetrating all relationships between men as a reflective form of the effort to dominate” (1991, p. 360).

Levinas operates out of a deep recognition that totalizing forces work behind the scenes in much of our everyday activity such that we are caught up in forms of domination without knowing what we do. In "Dialogue: Self-Consciousness and Proximity of the Neighbor" (1998a), Levinas leads the reader step-by-step through various understandings of dialogic relationship toward a challenging suggestion that even our attempts at encounter may often fail to fulfill dialogue's potential. In what follows, we attempt to walk in the steps of the analysis provided by Levinas, for the sake of seeing where he transcends Gadamer's forms of the I-Thou relation as they apply to international curriculum work.

The first section of Levinas's discussion of dialogue is named: "Spirit as knowledge, and immanence." At this first level, thought and philosophy reside in Oneness; dispersion and otherness are relative terms, with unity and sameness their required center; self and its consciousness reigns. "The unity of the *I think* is the ultimate form of spirit as knowledge. And to this unity ... all things are referred ... The system of what is intelligible is, ultimately, a consciousness of self" (1998a, p. 139). Here we face the Cartesian influence on later thought, reinforced by Kant. Once I discover my own self-consciousness, I have found the beginning and the end of knowledge. I need no other, for I am all. This view, even though we may see it as outmoded, lives on in much contemporary thinking and action. Much economic, political, and even educational thinking places heavy emphasis on the individual 'I', even though even a brief moment spent in analysis, as Aristotle knew, (Aristotle 2002, p. 10) will show us that 'self-sufficiency' cannot be thought of legitimately outside a thoroughly social setting.

Next comes "The dialogue of immanence": "The *I think* in which being-in-act is constituted can be interpreted as coinciding with what it constitutes: the full self-consciousness of the *I think* would be the very *system* of knowledge in its unity of intelligibility" (1998a, p. 139). We are told in this section that the 'spirit' may engage in inner conversation or 'dialogue' without breaking out of its sameness. ("According to the traditional interpretation ... the spirit thinking remains no less one and unique ..." p. 140.) Additional interlocutors change nothing; we merely get more of the Same, by means of the hegemony of Reason, for "Reason is one. It has no one left with whom to communicate; nothing is outside of it" (p. 141). This faces the specter of the Enlightenment with all its difficult baggage, from which we even now have great difficulty escaping.

This form of 'dialogue' "in which ... reciprocal alterity is suppressed" possibly "brings someone to reason" but the exchange "will hold ultimately within a single soul, in a single consciousness"; it requires and maintains peace through "a power of domination", "power over [the other person] as over a thing" (1998, p. 141). Hegel, Levinas tells us, places knowledge first and perceives multiplicity as a challenge to be overcome by "this priority of knowledge over dialogue" (p. 143). But the effort itself, Levinas says, "signifies the impossibility of language's staying within the dimensions of the *cogito*" (p. 143). In other words, dialogue under the aegis of Reason becomes an instrument of stuck power relations. As Levinas says elsewhere, "... violence does not consist so much in injuring or annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves ..." (1969, p. 21)

In 'Dialogue and transcendence', Levinas says, "... beyond the sufficiency of the being-for-itself another possibility of excellence is shown in the human dimension that is not measured by the perfection of the

consciousness-of-self" (1998a, p. 143). Beyond knowledge "raised to the universal intelligibility into which these thinking I's would be absorbed, or sublimated, or united ... by way of this unity of Reason" (p. 143) lies a fundamental "sociality ... in the summons of a You by an I, ... what Buber calls by the primary word 'I-Thou,' ... the principle and the basis ... of all dialogue" (p. 143). We are not stuck forever with the self-referential mode of conversation that leads every discussion back to a forced unity. Self-consciousness does not stand as the only point of entry into our work and lives together. There is instead another principle at work, that of an *inter*-relation, a basic *sociality*, or, for our purposes, a *mutuality*, that takes us past an inflexibly complete self with no room for a genuine other. We are again tempted in our time and place to believe we achieve this form of dialogue by merely talking and making an attempt to listen. But both speaker and listener can quite easily be caught up in one of the structures of dialogue in which power relations are blocked or absolutized without our awareness or acknowledgement. Levinas warns us of the ease with which what appears to be our talk with one another can be instead be merely talk with ourselves. The 'subject' in idealism, Levinas explains, cannot escape the I-It relation, for it makes all beings into objects; dialogue on the other hand, "an event of spirit, at least as irreducible and old as the *cogito*" (1998a, p. 144), is not a realm of 'use' or 'experience' (Buber 1996) but an 'encounter' between unique selves without possible synthesis.<sup>14</sup> Knowledge no longer closes the distance between self and other by way of subsuming the other to the self/one. Difference is not lost to knowledge or unity, uniqueness is preserved – here we find "the extraordinary and immediate relation of dia-logue, which transcends this distance without suppressing it or recuperating it"; here the relation is "different from that of knowing him: [it is] to approach the neighbor" (p. 144).

Between two persons in dialogue "absolute distance" obtains (1998a, p. 145); they cannot be encompassed by a third person view; there is no correct objective description that subsumes the dialogue under the order of knowledge or unity or a synthesis or a totalizing truth. The I-Thou relation always appears as though as an image (or 'reflection') of a human-divine relation, in which the other is unaccountably alien, in which alterity is absolute and can never be *overcome* by thought or by goodwill. Dialogue thus conceived is not a secondary phenomenon, parasitical as it were on the separate self and its individual consciousness. "One may legitimately ask oneself whether the internal discourse of the *cogito* is not already a derivative mode of the conversation with the other, ... whether the very interruption of the spontaneous impulse of thought reflecting upon itself ... does not bear witness to an *original and foregoing* dialogue" (p. 146). "Posited before the unity of the *self-consciousness*, which is equal to itself and makes itself equal to the world, is thus the encounter in dialogue which would be a thought thinking beyond the world" (1998, p. 146). We meet, not just in struggles of power or in repetitions of sameness, but also in forms of transcendence that push and pull and form us in ways we cannot control and do not initially envision.

*What happens when we move from the neat categories of theory to our  
everyday or extraordinary<sup>15</sup> practice?*

---

<sup>14</sup> "The Encounter, or proximity, or sociality, is not of the same order as experience," (1998a) p. 145.

<sup>15</sup> I take, for instance, international curriculum work to be 'extraordinary practice'.

(1) We cannot shake relations of power, we cannot move ideas from context to context without our games of truth holding the flow of information in question, and we cannot distance ourselves from others or seek connection without self practices playing a role on all sides. So we do not operate in a vacuum of forces, ideas, or practices. We function, either through awareness or without it, at the intersection of power, truth, and self. This meeting of Foucault's "components necessary for constituting a field of experience" (2003, p. 23) requires on our part a certain level of consciousness regarding the aspects of that field. We might seek to deny that we engage in relations of power or that what we offer is merely one game of truth, but such practices close our eyes to both our investment in the situation and our responsibility for it. As Foucault further says, our interactions, whether dialogical or polemical, constitute a "whole morality" (p. 18) that runs either toward mutuality or toward monopoly.

(2) A fusion of horizons will always describe different spheres of power, truth, and self between participants. In Gadamer's view, "The interactive nature of dialogue means that once we are drawn in, we do not escape without being changed in some sense. In a genuine conversation, we cannot assert our views and continue to hold them in the same way that we did upon entering the dialogue. Rather, the act of engaging in conversation transforms these views or leads to the articulation of new truths of which we were previously unaware" (Walhof 2005, p. 166). Of course, "in human relationships ... power is always present: ... [there is always] a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" (Foucault 2003b, p. 34). Foucault is quick to point out, however, that in the ordinary case "these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once for all" (p. 34). Gadamer wants to make a further point, one that extends our moral relations, in suggesting that a fusion of horizons can occur in which, we might say, the conversation itself takes over, in which we learn and teach much more than we do or can consciously intend. In this sense, when we truly engage one another we open the door for the possibility that power relations, games of truth, and the relations to self and other present in each moment of experience can be formed and reformed by the dialogue itself. The relationship in which we take the other seriously can carry us into an encounter in which unplanned learning becomes the order of our interaction and in which dialogue takes over and proposes new experience that stands at the center of any genuine ethics of curriculum work, wherever it takes place. Ethics in this sense is not simply what I do but more certainly what I am willing to undergo.

(3) Encounter without end always transcends immanence and makes immanent the transcendent – we are always potential debtors to the otherness we meet. We may wish to ignore or find problematic the notion of transcendence we meet in Levinas, and we certainly should not simply swallow it whole without thought. Yet the final movement of our ethical encounter with the other must be allowed to break us open to that which our thinking and words can never wholly contain. We need not assume any sort of traditional religious stance toward the other in order to recognize a depth of connection and of challenge in our meeting with our colleagues, whether local, national, or international. The Levinasian notion of the transcendent means at least that we discover in our work together an encounter with what Alfred North Whitehead described as the work of philosophy: "Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains" (1938, p. 168). To recognize the wonder in another and in our encounters and work together—across cultures and borders

or not—is to recognize a form of transcendence, not as another means to control or a path to the obstruction of thought, but as a simple awareness that not-knowing is the truest truth of our relationship to Truth.

**Reference list:**

- Buber, M. (1996) *I and Thou*. (W. Kaufman, Trans.) New York, NY: Touchstone.
- Collingwood, R. G. (1939). *An Autobiography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Collingwood, R. G. (1940). *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Crane, A., Knights, D., & Starkey, K. (2008). The Conditions of Our Freedom: Foucault, Organization, and Ethics. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 18(3), 299-320.
- Dallmayr, F. (2003). Cosmopolitanism. *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy*, 31(3), 421-442.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The use of pleasure: Volume 2 of the history of sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (2003a) Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An interview with Michel Foucault, in P. Rabinow and N. Rose (Eds) *The essential Foucault*. New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, M. (2003b) The ethics of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom, in P. Rabinow and N. Rose (Eds) *The essential Foucault*. New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, M. (2005). *The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*. New York: Picador.
- Gadamer, H.G. (1991) *Truth and method*. 2<sup>nd</sup> revised ed. (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.) New York: Crossroad.
- Godrej, F. (2009). Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other. *Polity*, 41(2), 135-165.
- Jabri, V. (2007). Solidarity and spheres of culture: the cosmopolitan and the postcolonial. *Review of International Studies*, 33, 715–728.
- Jordaan, E. (2009). Dialogic Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice. *International Studies Review*, 11(4), 736-748.
- Kögler, H. H. (1996). *The power of dialogue: Critical hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Levinas, E. (1969) *Totality and Infinity: An essay on exteriority*. (A. Lingis, Trans.) Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press
- Levinas, E. (1998a). Dialogue: Self-consciousness and the proximity of the neighbor, in *Of God who comes to mind* (pp. 137-151). (B. Bergo, Trans.) Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1998b). Questions and answers, in *Of God who comes to mind* (pp. 79-99). (B. Bergo, Trans.) Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Linklater, A. (2005). Dialogic politics and the civilising process. *Review of International Studies*, 31(1), 141-154.
- Loacker, B., & Muhr, S. (2009). How Can I Become a Responsible Subject? Towards a Practice-Based Ethics of Responsiveness. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 90(2), 265-277.
- McLaren, M. (2006). From Practices of the Self to Politics: Foucault and Friendship. *Philosophy Today*, 50(Supp), 195-201.
- Plato. (2001). *The trial and death of Socrates*. Trans. John M. Cooper and G. M. A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Sandel, M. (1984). The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self. *Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy*, 1281-96.
- Vessey, D., & Blauwkamp, C. (2006). Hans-Georg Gadamer 'The Incapacity for Conversation' (1972). *Continental Philosophy Review*, 39(4), 351-359.
- Villa, D. (2001) *Socratic citizenship*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Walhof, D. (2005). Bringing the Deliberative Back In: Gadamer on Conversation and Understanding. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 4(2), 154-174.
- Whitehead, A. N. (1938). *Modes of thought*. New York: Free Press.