

A Zero Space of Nonviolence

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What really characterizes our time is not so much that there is so much violence—there have been such times before—but that we are challenged, possibly as never before, to deal with it.

(Michael N. Nagler, 2004, p. 3)

BERGAMO JUST CELEBRATED its 30th anniversary last October. This issue of *JCT* publishes two papers selected for the Distinguished Graduate Student Paper Award, and Janet Miller's stunning speech at the conference, along with Adam Howard's response, will be published in next issue. Unfortunately, I was not able to experience the spirit of the conference as I was visiting one of my "home" universities in China where I studied as an undergraduate student twenty years ago. However, my own homecoming enabled me to get in touch with a zero space of nonviolence which hosts all-inclusive life energy to go against violence in its various forms through nonviolent means.

As a matter of fact, I have only been back from China for a week as I start writing this editorial. During my sabbatical leave, I lectured at various universities and interviewed four participants (two Americans and two Chinese) about their pathways of cross-cultural engagement in a life history research project, traveling from the north to the south in China.

In my hometown, Harbin, a northern city near to Russia, I read Peter Taubman's (2008) book, *Teaching by Numbers*, a sweeping and provoking critique of the current standardization movement in American education. What had stuck a cord with me was his analysis of why some educators could have bought into the anti-educational rhetoric of *No Child Left Behind*. He points out that there are four reasons for why educators did not say no to NCLB: shame, fear, fantasies, and "unresolved mourning for the lost ideals of racial integration and the eradication of poverty" (p. 128). It was the last reason that lingered with me throughout my travels in China. He argues that the unsuccessful mourning over the loss of the ideal produces a sense of guilt that leaves many educators, including progressive and radical educators, susceptible to the discourses and practices of standards that provide the comfort to *talk* about diversity without confronting our ambivalence towards the lost ideal.

I grew up in Harbin before I went to college. Reading all those Chinese novels on communist revolutions when I was a little girl did not carve a revolutionary mind out of me; I simply did not understand why people could not live together in peace. When I was a teenager, the “trauma literature” which revealed the cruelty of Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in China deeply saddened me, and I hoped that such a horror would not happen again. However, when I was a junior at college, students’ blood was spilled in Tiananmen Square in 1989. That was my first encounter with the brutality of state violence in reality, along with my fear that the whole country was on the edge of chaos. It wounded my psyche in such a profound way that I still have not yet been able to speak about it in order to work it through.

Since then I have been a wandering soul who has not been “saved” by either American democracy or the Christian God. I have enjoyed much more academic freedom in the American academy with appreciation and gratitude, but I find it difficult to embrace democracy when American political leaders have repeatedly evoked the ideal of “democracy” to justify bombing another country, which the mainstream American public was ready to accept, or when the banner of democracy is used in a smaller scale of academic community to exclude difference in a violent way, rather than include all. I keep asking myself: What other vision can we evoke if it seems that there is no obvious internal mechanism in “democracy” to prevent violence? I have not found peace in fundamentalist Christianity’s doctrines either due to its dualistic passion for individual salvation which is ironically compatible with the modern Western philosophical dualistic pursuit of reason. Twenty years after the Tiananmen tragedy, reading Taubman’s analysis, I ask myself: Is it possible that nonviolence provides a thread for me to work through my impossible longing for peace?

Only nonviolence *cannot* justify any violence, whether it is physical, emotional, spiritual, political, social, or conceptual, whether it is individual or collective. Have we *ever* heard any political leader evoke the principle of nonviolence to arm a nation to go to war? “Violence begets violence” while “nonviolence begets nonviolence” (Nagler, 2004). My heart is slowly coming back into whole as I embrace nonviolence as an educational vision.

This vision has already emerged from my eight years of teaching multicultural education courses on a predominately White university campus, discussed in my presentation on a nonviolent approach to social justice education at the AAACS annual meeting in 2009, before I left for my China trip. One of the pedagogical aporias that I have continuously experienced in teaching difficult knowledge related to social differences is how to deal with students’ emotional difficulty in unlearning their fundamental assumptions, perceptions, and understandings. The root of social and political hierarchy is the mechanism of domination and control. In other words, racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other social violence are symptoms of domination which desires to control or even erase the other in order to preserve the self. However, in erasing the other, the self cannot be sustained either.

To treat such symptoms we must treat the root problem, and nonviolence promises to go against violence yet does not follow any route of imposition or violent means. It has gradually become clear to me that nonviolence based upon organic interconnections and responsible individuality can undo the legacy of racial, gender, class, heterosexual violence, and other social violence, while not falling into a simplistic identity politics in which the fixation of identity on the previously excluded location shifts the center but is still implicated in the desire for mastery and control. As a result, changing from a more direct, confrontational teaching to a more fluid waterway of teaching, I have been trying to develop nonviolent pedagogical approaches so that I can be a guide in working with students through their emotional difficulty to dissolve resistance

to unlearning and to embrace a compassionate vision of education (For detail about instructors' pedagogy and students' journey to unlearn and learn in multicultural education, see Wang & Olson, 2009).

Reading Taubman's analysis in my birthplace brought a revelatory moment to connect my life history and pedagogy of nonviolence. After that, the rest of my China trip took on its own spin to bring this new lens into focus. During my lecture tours at seven Chinese universities, I asked my Chinese audiences about their lost ideals and what they can do in the aftermath of this loss to rethink our commitment to education, and I proposed "a playful curriculum of nonviolence through engaging differences in a zero space" in my last lecture in Southern China, a port city facing Hong Kong across the river. Both the tours and my life history interviews with four participants in my research brought me full circle locating nonviolence as my emergent *and* renewed commitment. An American participant in these life history interviews has been devoted to U.S.-China educational exchange for more than a decade and is currently working in a Chinese university. To my astonishment, he also witnessed and suffered along with Chinese—although in a different way—our Chinese national trauma in 1989 and embarked on a journey of working through the tragedy through intercultural education. That tragedy undoubtedly, as I reflect upon it now, was crucial in motivating my own cross-cultural quest for nonviolence intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

We have discussed so much about democracy, justice, equality, and equity in the field of American education, but we seldom discuss nonviolence and education. We seldom hear the voice of nonviolence that has echoed thousands of years throughout human history. From Leo Tolstoy to Mahatma Gandhi, from Jane Addams to Thích Nhất Hạnh, from Lao Zi to Martin Luther King Jr., declarations of nonviolence and peace have inspired the prevailing of human spirit over injustice and cruelty. Those declarations remain powerful in their absence in today's security-stringent and anxiety-ridden climate. As educators, I suggest that we need to listen to them especially attentively.

Educationally speaking, violence is multidimensional, much more extensive than a literal understanding of corporal punishment. Conceptually, when we label a student as a "low-achieving student (差生)" in Chinese schools or as "students at risk" in American schools, it is violence. Intellectually, when we constrain students' freedom to move around and explore on their own in China or when we shape our students into the boxes of standards as currently happening at American schools, it is violence. Emotionally, when we demand Chinese children to obey authorities without meaningful intergenerational dialogue or when we allow American boys to be "just boys" without guiding their rebellious spirit back into intergenerational connectedness, it is violence. Culturally, when we drop off our children at a Chinese school and urge them "to study hard" without examining the negative effects of intellectual elitism at the expense of children's well being or when we drop off our children at an American school and tell them "to have fun" without helping them to make the link between pleasure and a meaningful purpose of life, it is violence (See Nagler, 2004, for his convincing arguments for why pursuing sensations without a sense of purpose and meaning in life is violence). In the media, if Chinese news only broadcasts one ideology to demand conformity from the younger generation or American news only portrays violent teenagers at school shootings without presenting the meaningful social engagements and services of many more teenagers, it is violence. Politically, when we teach our students to be blindly loyal to our countries but do not critique the nationalist ethnocentrism inherent in the desire to dominate the world, it is also violence.

Only nonviolence as education and nonviolence education, I argue, can serve as the most pervasive antidote to the accumulative effects of violence through organic, interconnected, and nonviolent relationships (including both human and human-bio relationships) in all scales of community in the long term. Responsible, courageous, fluid, and creative individuality which does not do violence to either the self or the other is the cornerstone of nonviolence. However, a separate sense of the individual that privileges oneself (whether in a personal sense, a group sense, or a national sense) against the shared life as humanity in a cosmos must be challenged in order to form nonviolent relationships. The concept of nonviolence is usually connected to anti-colonial and civil rights movements in the contemporary age, but as I point out, its principle in promoting peace exists throughout human history. This principle is not only an antidote to violence, but more importantly, it also is a constructive vision for building a loving, compassionate, and co-creative community.

The possibility of nonviolence is dependent upon whether one can sustain the tensionality within the self as one reaches out for the other with compassion. Jane Addams worked through her depression through study and social activism to become an intellectual woman who was committed to social justice and a promoter of peace during the time of war (See Bill Pinar's chapter on Jane Addams' life history and her approach to nonviolence, 2009, Chapter 5). Nelson Mandela (2003/1994) spent more than two decades of his lifetime in prison but was able to sustain his courage and strength over anguish, despair, and anger to work out an approach, while in confinement, for South Africa to achieve independence from colonialism through negotiation rather than war, ahead of his colleagues on the outside. In prison, his hatred of apartheid system intensified, but his anger with those who implemented apartheid system was softened. In his inauguration speech, he gracefully took his enemy F. W. de Klerk's hand and announced: "I am proud to hold your hand—for us to go forward together....Let us work together to end division" (Quoted in Nagler, 2004, p. 14). While both Jane Addams and Mandela Nelson are extraordinary leaders, many ordinary people practice nonviolence in their lives as well (For more examples of such successes throughout the world both in the past and in the contemporary age, both in ordinary and extraordinary people's lives, see Nagler, 2004). Cultivating inner peace to reach outer peace is an essentially educational project, and as educators, we need to engage peace education for ourselves if we would like to embody and teach nonviolence to our students.

I borrow the Taoist and Buddhist notion of zero to suggest that nonviolence does not exclude any person but includes all: Even the most violent person on the surface has the potential to be rehumanized. Nonviolence does not denounce any person but denounces violence. Refusing the route of either national amnesia or Nuremberg trial style retribution, South Africa followed a remarkable "third way" to reconcile the terrible trauma inflicted by the Apartheid regime. Desmond Tutu's (1999) accounts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's works in *No Future without Forgiveness* demonstrate such an inspiring process. If violence is an act of dehumanization, nonviolence works to rehumanize not only its victims but also perpetrators. Nonviolence directly confronts violence, but in the spirit of *ubuntu*, what it works to achieve is:

the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be give the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense. (Tutu, 1999, pp. 54–55)

For those fallen into the depth of violence for too long, nonviolence may not have any immediate effect, but its constructive effects on the community as a whole take time to work magic.

Moreover, I use “zero” to indicate that nonviolence is not attached to any particular form except insisting on its nonviolent principle. Any form of ideal that serves to evoke the compassionate side of humanity to dissolve the hard core of violence is nonviolent. When democracy is inclusive based upon creative relationality rather than reinforcing rugged individualism, majority rule, or colonial desire for mastery, it is nonviolent. When justice is restorative of human interconnections rather than retributive in merely punishing “criminals”—however defined—and expelling them from a humane community, it is nonviolent. When Christian spirituality serves to uplift humanity from hatred and cruelty rather than controlling people through conformity, it is nonviolent. Thus a zero space of nonviolence represents an all-inclusive, life-affirmative energy that flows out the force of conflicts towards widening, rather than narrowing, multiple paths while threading through the broken links along the way. Carrying the tensionality of multiple directions, nonviolence is not passive or indulgent but affirmative through its powerful movement. While I don’t rely on a faith in God to support a humane vision as some religious leaders do (Tutu, 1999), I have a profound faith in humanity’s capacity to dissolve violence, to rise above hatred and domination, to pursue loving relationships, and to aspire to what is good in life in order to create a more peaceful world.

Nonviolence in a zero space decenters the tyranny of “one” in authoritarianism, goes beyond the opposites of “two” in dualism, and embraces the multiplicity of “three” without privileging the third. What it requires is the ability to see that “mountain are again mountains, trees are again trees, and people are again people” after seeing through the dissolution of the boundary of mountain, tree, and person (Aoki, 2005, p. 432). The detachment and distance from one’s own boundary in order to embrace life at a higher, more interconnected, level is a necessary step to enable the movement of nonviolence.

To speak about nonviolent relationships among different groups in the field of curriculum studies, I suggest that under the pressure of standards and accountability that promotes instrumental means to maintain international superiority in American education—the gaze from the tyrannical “one”—simplistic identity politics within progressive camps also threatens to trap educators in their Balkanic struggles over increasingly shrunken territory. Identity-based struggles, when contextualized in the interconnected web of life, have played a progressive role in the field. However, without contextualizing and complicating one’s own investment in a broader project of education for all, without taking a step back from one’s own particular subjective positioning to see a bigger picture, any *fixation* upon a particular marginalized group’s struggle—along or within the line of either race, gender, class, sexuality, or other social factor—at the expense of the collective good arrests a progressive dream as an unfulfilled dream. The inclusive and generative zero space of nonviolence becomes even more important for creating new roads in today’s competitive educational world.

Opening the first class of a multicultural education course one week after I return to the U.S., I feel a strange sense of both detachment from and ease with what I am currently teaching, facing a roomful of students. Part of the detachment, I admit, comes from jet lag; part of the comfort in detachment, I guess, comes from my mind which still sits in China quite a bit. Life here through teaching and study is still the same, yet already different, imprinted by what I have carried back from an enlightening journey in China.

Re-reading the articles in Features in this issue, I start with Alan Block’s “homecomings and leaveings,” follow Richard Sawyer’s travel to Mexico and his re-articulation of democracy in an

international setting, imagine Claire Robson's transnational move in her queer quest for re-writing heteronormative discourses in an arts-based, activist group of queer seniors, walk towards Kerri Richardson's intersections of the embodiment and emergence as a mathematics teacher educator, and listen to Pauline Sameshima's and Carl Leggo's lyrics of love singing a song of passionate pedagogy. Their own dancing steps are unique (Doll, 1993), and I join them through a zero space.

Disturbed by his "homecoming dreams" which never brings him home, Alan Block wakes up to find himself in his own bed. Following Jacques Lacan's inarticulable Desire, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's insatiable pursuit of the transcendent, and Christopher Bollas' "unthought known," Block goes out into the world to search for what he does not yet know. Accompanying his journey, he locates homeleaving, rather than homecoming, as the central theme of the first book of the Bible, *Genesis*. Block's unfulfilled homecoming dreams and his engagement with these texts reveal to him the movement of his life: always a home leaving and yet always a home seeking. He concludes this paper by asking us to ponder: "In classrooms, we teachers might learn to lead our students out from home to find their home."

Richard Sawyer also leaves home and comes back to ask: "How do students and educators begin to imagine new possibilities for international democratic education when they go beyond the form that they know and have lived?" In his recent trip to Mexico, he witnessed democracy-in-action in Mexicans' daily praxis, different from his home-grown American view of democracy. His paper uses a kaleidoscope as a central metaphor to weave the images of border art-works and Mexicans' narratives for questioning what a lived democracy means for both local and global settings. Sawyer also takes us to his teacher education classroom where students engage *currere* and duoethnography to critique personal and national narratives at the "new international intersections of interpersonal dialogue, collective action, and democratic aspirations."

As a young lesbian and a feminist, Claire Robson didn't feel at home with Margaret Thatcher's conservative platform of education. She escaped from such a profession and came to North America. Twenty years later, her queer journey brought her back into education as she dialogued with the texts of Madeleine Grumet, Bill Pinar, Christopher Lasch, and Deborah Britzman. In exile, she engages the world through education for social justice outside of the classroom, exemplified in her pioneering leadership of a community art group, Quirk-e (The Queer Imaging & Riting Collective for Elders), where writing became a fun yet challenging, empowering yet uneasy process of "novel education" through encountering with the uncanny.

Kerri Richardson elaborates the notion of "being in the world with mathematics" as the key to mathematics education, which grows out of her autobiographical experiences both as a student and as a teacher educator. Drawing upon the works of Jayne Fleener, Bill Doll, and Brent Davis, Richardson identifies four key elements in her own spirited mathematics methods instruction—listening, collaborating, reflecting, and struggling—and elaborates their dynamic interaction. Her reimagining of mathematics teaching and learning asks probing questions about searching for patterns within mathematics and forming the connectedness of the inner life.

Pauline Sameshima and Carl Leggo lay a "poet's corpus in love" at the heart of curriculum and pedagogy. Composing poems and lyrics about the inloveness of educational eros, they write letters to each other, calling for "a creative and pedagogical commitment to love's confusing complexity, labyrinthine dangers, healing efficacy, indefatigable optimism, and inimitable imagination." Unsettling the taken-for-granted assumptions and conventions about learning, they depict a passionate picture of an engaged pedagogy. What can be more effective than a space of

dialogic relationships and interstitial intimacy in pedagogical love to dissolve the eruption of violence both literally and metaphorically?

Jackie Bach chaired the 2009 selection committee for Distinguished Graduate Student Paper Award. Thanks to her outstanding work not only in selecting award papers but also in the editorial process with authors, the two papers included in this issue are excellent. Kirsten Edwards' paper opens a space of academic "in-betweenness," through her own lived experiences and three other individuals' narratives in higher education, to investigate how they navigate and negotiate a formerly colonized academic world. Understanding the voices of these four academic "in-betweeners" who occupy different socially constructed spaces, she asks provocative questions about how to make sense of colonial contradictions in order to contest the colonial nature of the Academy. David Lewkowich's paper addresses the issue of boredom at a deeper level through engaging the texts of Heidegger, Benjamin, and Kracauer to reveal the potentiality that lies in the ambiguity and ambivalence of boring. His notion of elusive learning dwelling in the temporality of boredom, in contrast to a progressive linear learning, brings us face to face with the fundamental questions of purpose and meaning in education. Both papers take us out of the conventional time and space to imagine new dimensions of life, teaching, and learning.

Our Literacies section editor, Reta Ugena Whitlock, also introduces two articles for that section. Please see her excellent editor's note for detail.

In this issue, we provide a recent book list that includes new books in curriculum studies, thanks to Jill Martin's marvelous and detailed work. The list does not intend to include all books related to curriculum studies but collects those discussing fundamental and general issues related to the field. While many subject matter-focused books are intimately related to curriculum theorizing, due to the limit of pages, we don't include those. Furthermore, the list is not exhaustive on the topic of general curriculum studies either but only intends to be a helpful tool for our readers' own search. This addition will be published each April, highlighting new books published in the previous year. I also would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Jill's brilliant editorial assistant work for the past two years, as she is graduating this Spring semester. I deeply appreciate and admire her insights as a young scholar and her strong sense of responsibility, whose combination is not only rare among her peers but also excels among more established scholars. I wish her well in her exciting new journey.

An acknowledgment of reviewers for their important contributions to the journal for the previous online issues is included in this issue. Thank you all for your excellent work! The success of this journal is highly dependent upon the support of such a wonderful scholarly community. We will not continue this acknowledgment after this issue, since the online system automatically generates acknowledgment letters for reviewers.

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