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Recovering a Phenomenological-Hermeneutic Understanding of the Human Being as “Learner”: *Exploring the Authentic Teacher-Pupil Relationship*

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Introduction

This paper responds to the discernable, deleterious influence that contemporary education, rooted in *social efficiency ideology*, with its “press for efficiency and standardization,” has on the understanding of the human being as authentic learner, which education is patently reducing to “automata” (Pinar, 2004, p. 28). The issue around which my paper is organized might be expressed in the following terms, and emerges from the “reconceptualist” movement in curriculum philosophy: Due to the depersonalization and alienation occurring in contemporary education, we have lost sight of and are moving farther way from what it means to be truly human, i.e., both students and educators are estranged from their authentic *phenomenological* sense of *self-hood* (Bonnett, 2009; Huebner, 1999; Greene 1995; Jardine 1992; Grumet 1988). I argue that educators, for the sake of education’s potential reform, once aware of this condition, should seek a return, for appropriation, to this forgotten ontological understanding of what it means to be human in the first instance, which is always already a primordial way of *Being-in-the-world*, wherein life unfolds as an *originary* “educative” process.

This essay is divided in tripartite: The first section explicates the critique of both traditional educational theory and theory associated with concept empiricism, both emerging out of *social efficiency* ideology. This understanding of education and the student obscures, or covers over, the primordial aspects of our Being, i.e., the ontological ways in which we are in the world. The next section provides a detailed analysis of the ontological constitution of the human being by revealing for thematic analysis, the ontological structures grounding its existence, which I define as a context of meanings and relationships built through communal relationships between those who, in the most primordial mode of existing, work collectively to interpret, understand, and discourse in meaningful ways about their world and being, i.e., “learn” about themselves and the world. The final section relates the philosophical conclusions I have drawn from the literature, which emerge from both my readings of philosophy and curriculum theory, to the “lived world,” or *Lebenswelt*, of the classroom, where the teacher-pupil relationship is reexamined. In what follows I present an alternative vision of education that is unavailable to research methods grounded in traditional quantitative methods with the goal of demonstrating how this ontological view of education as related to the question of Being might lead to a transfigured and reinvigorated understanding of teaching and learning, teacher and learner.

1. Scientific Technical Knowledge in Research and the Curriculum: Teaching and Learning as an Inauthentic Exercise in Prediction, Abstraction, and Behaviorism

Huebner (1999) is critical of (1) education’s privileging of empirical forms of curriculum research, which function methodologically as a “social science,” above all other forms of educational inquiry and (2) education’s privileging of scientific-technical knowledge in the curriculum, a form of knowing that is expressed, proximally and for the most part, through abstract conceptualization. Education favors forms of curriculum knowledge classified as *axiomatic* and *empirical* because they are manageable and measurable by quantitative standards. Both trends emerge from *social efficiency ideology*, which includes the views of traditionalist and concept-empiricist curriculum making, and it values most greatly knowledge that is functional and instrumental. Spring (2000) identifies the “instrumental” goals of contemporary education,

which include “preparation for work, control of labor, and economic development” (p. 5). Hence, it is possible to state, along with Bonnett (2009), that education “shapes the selves of its learners in accordance with what are perceived to be current economic imperatives rather than, say, with what arises from their sense of their own existence,” their ownmost ontological potentiality-for-Being (p. 358). Both of Huebner’s concerns are epistemological in nature, but, since my concern in this essay is primarily ontological, I recognize the necessity of avoiding the error into which *social efficiency* falls, namely, the problem of posing epistemological questions at the utter “expense of the ontological considerations related to who students are becoming” (Dall’Alba, 2010, p. 54).

Modes of curriculum inquiry and research inspired by concept empiricism, work under the mistaken belief that education theory (as “practical theory”) functions in the identical manner as empirical theory, namely, that it holds the power to accurately and legitimately explain, describe, and predict educational outcomes (Moore, 1978). Such educational inquiry is “concerned with developing a hypothesis to be tested, and testing them in a methodological ways characteristic of mainstream social science” (Pinar, 2009, p. 17). As Grumet (1992) remarks, this depersonalizes and homogenizes students, stripping them of their uniqueness and individual potentiality-for-Being, reducing the them to cold “epistemological subjects of research,” which sets them up for manipulation and control - from unique human beings with a burgeoning sense of *phenomenological self-hood* students become the “*tabula rasa* upon which the world makes its marks, a template of social conditioning” (p. 29).

Reliance on this form of educational research presents a false picture of world, suggesting the existence of an “objective” and neutral plane (*sub specie aeternitatis*) from which to survey and accurately assess the so-called “truth” of our existence in a way that avoids the trap of relativism or subjectivism. Such methods inspire a *product-process* line of curriculum making, wherein research determines the pre-specification of essential content and pedagogy and the design of the learning experience in advance, and often times, at a proximal remove from the practical unfolding of the learning in the classroom. Clearly, the educational philosophy of Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005) emerges from this tradition in *social efficiency*, and although playing itself off as an advocate for *social reconstruction*, its “positivist” drive is evident, for it seeks to reduce learning to the study of meta-cognition, basic cognitive processes, and the transfer of knowledge to students through ever-greater hyper-efficient strategies for information-processing (e.g., arguing that “efficient” teachers should embrace and adhere to the *How People Learn Framework*, which might serve as the panacea for current curricular ills).

The second issue, that of privileging knowledge forms in the curriculum, i.e., technical-scientific knowledge, deserves a bit more attention, for it is directly linked to the unique ways in which we attempt to understand and communicate our lived experience about things that matter to us, namely, how we understand and care for our Being and the Being of others in the community of “learning.” Education’s privileging of technical-scientific knowledge, according to Jardine (1992), gives the “perception that one does not really understand the world, oneself, or others without such knowledge [...] being alive becomes something to *solve*, and finding one’s life difficult, ambiguous, or uncertain is a *mistake* to be corrected” (p. 122). Grumet (1992) equates education’s refusal to acknowledge other forms of knowledge with “epistemological elitism,” stemming from education’s refusal to address the ontological issues that ground all educative endeavors. Thus, education, with its “emphasis on abstraction and rational thinking, underestimates the turmoil of desire, the force of ideology, all the conflict and tension in adult conceptualization” (p. 31). Huebner’s great concern with the rise of scientific knowledge in the curriculum is that this form of knowledge provides an erroneous metaphysical and a highly restrictive epistemological view of the human and her world, for it embraces Cartesian *dualism*, the subject-object divide, wherein the world stands at an objective remove from the subject, who must internalize her experience of the world through “representation” and “abstraction,” assimilating the world in knowledge in order to then act upon the world – here, the movement of “knowledge-and-praxis” is *external-internal-external*.

As Huebner (1999) points out, when we approach the world and others “enclosed in the framework of the subject-object attitude,” we tend to view others as objects, as “essentially predictable, controllable,” as something to be “studied and known” (p. 88). This limited understanding of knowledge and the subject manifests in the Tyler (1949) rationale, where the learning experience “refers to the interaction between learner and the external conditions of the environment to which he can react,” and further, the teacher

should structure the learning environment in such a way as to illicit the desired behaviors, which are “implied in the objective” (pp. 63-65). For me, this bias toward scientific-technical knowledge in education creates two problems, which relate to epistemology and ontology: (1) if educational theory concerns itself exclusively with quantitative methodologies, then it is constructing a disingenuous, and severely limited view of educators and students and the process of authentic learning (e.g., the learner is at a metaphysical remove from the world; learning is reduced to the acquisition of knowledge, skill sets, and habituated behaviors) and (2) if the curriculum concerns itself primarily with the mode of world-disclosure associated with scientific-technical knowledge, then it is espousing an inauthentic understanding of the way in which the human relates to the world in terms of knowledge and understanding (e.g., knowledge is an objective phenomenon and it stands at an epistemological remove from the subject).

“Education,” as Jardine (1992) contends, “has turned away from the risks of self-transcendence involved in the exploration of many possibilities of understanding, self-understanding, and mutual understanding [i.e., hermeneutics] – an exploration in which one is engaged in confronting that which is Other,” i.e., that which is recalcitrant and resistant to all epistemological efforts to pin it down once and for all (p. 121). Authentic education, according to Huebner (1999), should provide a variety of epistemological experiences, for it is only when the student begins to “recognize values and uses of scientific ways of knowing and of artistic and poetic ways of knowing,” that she can specialize, i.e., choose a life-path authentically by “taking and polishing the spectacles” of either the “scientist, artist, or poet” (p. 42). Education, as I have outlined, emerging from *social efficiency*, is deterministic and it obscures the understanding that humans are free, that they have a sense of *phenomenological self-hood*, and that they are “individual centers of consciousness capable of relating to the world in ways that have personal meaning, for this is essential to human being as against some sort of mechanized and depersonalized being” (Bonnett, 2001, p. 30). It is now to the analysis of *phenomenological self-hood* and the human as *Being-in-the-world* as *Being-with* others that I turn.

2. Phenomenological Self-Hood and the Ontological Structures of *Being-in-the-world* as *Being-with* Others: The Primordial Modes of Human Learning as Understanding, Interpretation, and Hermeneutic Discourse

Since I am approaching phenomenology in a non-technical manner, much like Huebner, I avoid formalizing the modes of the phenomenological *epoche* and *eidetic reduction*, for unlike Husserl, I am not concerned with the transcendental consciousness and the intentional structures that constitute the “what” and “how” of the subject’s (student’s) cognitive experience (Brogan, 2005). I am engaging in phenomenology by reviewing the philosophical literature in order to locate major points of convergence, wherein I am able to “recognize” something familiar in their descriptions, a recognition that can be spontaneously related to my own world (as educator and student) and the occasions wherein I have had similar, if not identical (educational), experiences sharing one or another quality. Ultimately, I am seeking that which might be termed universal to all such similar practical and particular experiences. It must be noted that since phenomenology cannot provide its conclusions in a way that satisfies the criteria of quantitative methods it often appears to be a highly subjective and inaccurate process, opening itself to the critique of epistemological relativism and subjectivism. However, as Morris (2005) points out, “far from phenomenology descriptions being untestable, we might say that our recognition is a *criterion for correctness* for a phenomenological description” (p. 29).

In this section, I elucidate for thematic analysis the invariant ontological structures, our existential ways of *Being-in-the-world* that empirical reality instantiates, which emerge through a distillation of the major ontological themes common to all the thinkers I have considered, and they are, in addition to a foundational sense of ontological autonomy: (1) identity and the unique potential-for-Being; (2) the *originary* sense of community and *historicality*; (3) the apprehension of temporality and finitude; and, what is unique to my analysis (4) the primordial condition of always already being “stretched out” (*oregesthai*) to the condition of learning (*as* learner) about the world from which we are inseparable. Bonnett (2009) offers a powerful description of the human being as it is conceived in its ontological grounds, which is clearly at odds with the notion of the “self” that contemporary education envisions, which I have introduced earlier, in terms of a product, object, or resource:

Self-hood is enduring, having its own life and identity; while shaped by its environment, it is not simply some sort of concrescence of that environment – it has an internal unity of its own and therefore a perspective on the world that is unique; it has feelings and a basic apprehension of its own existence – its experiences have the quality of ‘mineness’ and of privacy [but at once of its irreducible social connectedness]; it is finite, having only one life to live and this life is the sum of all that is possible for that individual (p. 359).

Forming the context within which this rich description of *phenomenological self-hood* pulses with life is the understanding that the human is always already immersed within its world and never at a subjective remove, i.e., primarily and originally a *Being-in-the-world*. The “world” as I conceive it is anything but the impoverished world philosophized by Descartes, rather it is a totality, web, or system of references, relations, and meanings that we are constantly in the process of establishing and reestablishing in communion with others, as *being-with*, through the process, or practice, of hermeneutic interpretation. The human shapes the world through her learning and the world in turn shapes her Being and understanding of it. Huebner (1999) also views hermeneutic activity as the primary practice by which we understand, interpret, and discourse authentically about our existence, and calls this process of interpreting and understanding our *Being-in-the-world* the “individual-world dialectic,” a process within which “cause is effect, and effect is cause. The world calls forth new responses from the individual, who in turn calls forth new responses from the world” (p. 174).

Analyzing the conception of hermeneutics in Gadamer (1990; 1989) will allow me to elucidate and formalize the four invariant ontological structures that were introduced above, this will set the stage for the move in which I concretize their relation to and relevance for conceiving an authentic education. Philosophical hermeneutics, for Gadamer, is a practice and not a “method,” it is a *practice* because it is the most original and primordial way in which we are located in the world; our most basic way of *Being-in-the-world* is in the mode of seeking understanding about our world *with-others*. Thus, we are always already stretched out to the communal condition of knowing, which unfolds, according to Davey (2006) through the moments of “translation” and “transcendence,” wherein we translate “the strange and the foreign into a more familiar idiom,” and by doing so we “effect a movement of transcendence in which we come to understand ourselves differently” (p. 51). Importantly, the form of understanding that emerges through hermeneutic discourse is not akin to scientific-technical knowledge, and the experience of hermeneutic understanding “stands in an intellectual opposition to knowledge and the kind of instruction that follows from general theoretical or technical knowledge,” and is in fact a more primordial way to comprehend the things around us, however, unlike empirical knowledge, it is incomplete, limited, and ambiguous at times (Gadamer, 1989, p. 355).

Hermeneutic understanding is bound up with Gadamer’s notion of *Bildung*, which happens in conjunction with and through the process of dialogue. Davey (2006) states that *Bildung*, as related to authentic education, is the very opposite of “training,” or the filling up of empty vessels with knowledge, or the passing along of skills, rather it is a monumental “transformative educative process of formation through the engagement and involvement with others” (Ibid. p. 39). Analyzing the term’s origins, Nordenbo (2002) states, “The suffix – *ung* on a verbal noun [*Bild*] in German indicates that we are dealing either with an act, a process or an occurrence,” and it is crucial to note that “as an educational idea, a person has acquired *Bildung* only if he or she has assisted *actively* in its formation or development” (p. 342). *Bildung* is the ability to resolutely and autonomously develop the “capacity, the ability to keep oneself open to what is other in order to gain a sense of oneself,” and this “preparedness or skill in changing mental perspectives” might be conceived as the *essential condition* of all authentic interpretive activities (Davey, 2006, p. 37).

Gadamer (1990) expresses this notion of *Bildung* through his hermeneutic reading of Plato, wherein he elucidates the distinctly “pedagogical aspects” of Socrates’ encounters with various interlocutors, all of whom experience a “formation” of their souls (*psyche*) through communal dialogue, or authentic discussion, as they work toward interpreting and defining the virtues, recounting in an essential and philosophical manner a mode of “human discussion which must be understood as discussion” (p. 21). This philosophical understanding of hermeneutics, “as a way of life represented by Socrates revealed the fundamental character of human existence as a whole,” which embodies a “formative educational effect,” wherein the primary purpose of the Platonic dialogues is “educational” (Ibid. p. 72). Here, I suggest that we might understand

Socrates' claim in the *Phaedo* regarding philosophy as the supreme preparation for death in terms of philosophy "living" only as a way of life, a way of *Being-in-the-world* in which *care for the soul* in its essence embodies the process of an authentic education, a process of learning about the "good life" and the severe limitations of human knowledge in community. Zuckert (1996), in her reading of Gadamer, echoes this line of reasoning when stating that for Plato, "dialogue was not simply an essential feature of philosophical inquiry but of human social life as well," thus the communal aspects of the "hermeneutics of facticity" must not be overlooked (p. 72).

The "hermeneutics of facticity" relates to Heidegger's (1962) phenomenological-hermeneutic analysis (*fundamental ontology*) of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*: "The phenomenology of Being is a hermeneutic in the primordial signification of the word, where it designates this business of interpreting," which signifies the "rootedness" of *Dasein* within the world of its dwelling, as *Being-in-the-world*, where its primary mode of Being is one of interpreting, understanding, and discoursing about the world in ways that have meaning for itself and its community (p. 62/33). Risser (2000) commenting on Gadamer's hermeneutics, stresses that our authentic interpretations always emerge from and return to our lived world, bringing us back to the "situation" enlightened, changed, different in some sense of understanding, and this is properly the "operation of philosophy itself," as it works to "catch hold of life in its activity," i.e., it is a living practice as *praxis* (p. 22). Hermeneutic activity, conceived as authentic educative dialogue, involves learning as an act of "interpreting itself," as it is not a technical process per se, reducible to the "cognitive apprehension by a subject, but a kind of illuminative disclosing of life in the explicit actualization of a moment of factual life" (Ibid. p. 22).

Interpretation works to clarify what is ambiguously given in understanding, and is never a presuppositionless apprehending of things, rather, we approach the things themselves, guided in the first instance by both their uniqueness as well as a preconception of what they might be in order to clarify our initial veiled and unclear conceptions of them to eventually deepen and solidify our understanding of them. This allows us to begin our hermeneutic interpretations, where our pre-understanding, our pre-conception, or "fore-having" of things facilitates our stepping into the circle, or spiral, of interpretation in the "right way" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 195/150). Specifically, when things, in relation to our Being are understood, "we say that they have meaning [*Sinn*]" (Ibid. p. 192/151). Here, I want to explicate a common theme within my reading of the phenomenological-hermeneutic tradition, namely, that meaning always arises in connection with the understanding (and knowledge) that I already possess, but is dependent for its development and expansion on all that I do not yet have, all that is not solely dependent upon my individuated Being, on all that can be offered to me only through my participation in a living "learning" community.

Whereas Huebner describes hermeneutic interpretation in terms of the human's temporality and *historicity* in the field of curriculum study, it is Gadamer (1989) who initially details the notions of time and history in relation to the hermeneutic unfolding of dialogue in both a synchronic and diachronic fashion, wherein humans develop meaning and deepen their understanding through interpretive acts that occur over and across time. Prior to understanding ourselves as individuals we need recognize that self-knowledge is grounded in our social-cultural identities, which are given in terms of "horizons," or contexts, of meaning. Gadamer calls the historical view to the world our "horizon" and this locates us within a context wherein past, present, and future are interdependent and we depend on the past, as *heritage* or tradition, in order to project an authentic historical future. Our development as humans represents the expansion of our horizon through interpretive acts wherein we essentially encounter those things and entities that are different, or radically Other, than ourselves, and the context of our horizon includes, as previously stated, the fore-knowledge, fore-understanding we possess as historically rooted beings with "pasts" that we bring to the context of the dialogue, or our engagement with "texts" – works of art, historical artifacts, social institutions, educational resources, other human beings – each of which possess their own unique horizon. When these horizons merge or fuse, new possibilities emerge which would not have been possible otherwise.

When we understand that the past is alive and it speaks in the present moment, and that it is necessary for the authentic projection of our potential self-understanding into the future, we possess a *historical consciousness*: "Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between text and the present" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 306). Consciousness is not made available to the individual in terms of static reflexive knowledge, but rather is made available in terms

of its ever-changing nature, which occur as the “horizon” with which it is engaged is interpreted. For Gadamer, understanding is always linked to dialogue and occurs, as I have described, through a fusion of historical horizons, that of the interpreter and “text,” which forms the context wherein past and present intersect. Although we might imagine the fusing of horizons in terms of a “confrontation,” this is not to be understood in terms of a combative engagement where one or the other is either usurped or transcended in dialectic synthesis, rather there is a counter-striving movement wherein the other’s horizon is taken up by the interpreter for the sake of understanding and is expanded in the present, contributing to the growth and development of the interpreter.

As Grumet (1992) points out, phenomenological descriptions “share an estrangement, a distancing from the everyday world in order to see the familiar with freshness and immediacy of the vision that is seeing for the first time” (p. 33). To suspend one’s judgment when observing or experiencing phenomena allows for a whole range of unique and previously overlooked dimensions of experience to manifest. For example, to observe or read about the processes of a “formal” and “institutionalized” education through a reconfigured lens, where epistemological and psychological categories are held in abeyance, things appear non-contingent and independent of our subjective categorizations for defining and understanding them (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). This foregoing section on the ontology of the human in the world *as* learner should allow the reader to glean insight into what is essential or common to all activities bound up with the processes of teaching and learning, without which the empirical and “formal” experience of education (teaching and learning) would be impossible. Based on the ontological analysis of *Being-in-the-world* as *Being-with*, as presented within a discussion on hermeneutics, I move to explore the authentic teacher-pupil relationship by formalizing the following fundamental question, which has both grounded and guided my inquiry from the outset: How is it that we are authentically in the world with others when learning? In response, I identify three ontological aspects that emerge from my analysis as will be related to education: (1) the concern with temporality and history (*heritage*); (2) the concern with interpreting and understanding our world (hermeneutics as bridge between self, other, and world); and (3) the concern with our existence as social beings in caring, solicitous relationships who are involved ecumenically in world-building.

3. The Authentic Teacher-Pupil Relationship as Informed Ontologically: Authentic Learning Conceived Through the Unfolding of Hermeneutic Discourse

The teacher-pupil relationship in education represents the experience of educators and learners within the ecumenical task, or process, of engaging that which is to be learned. Here, we would include the normative concern with the most valuable types of things that ought to be learned; things comprising the curriculum’s content. In essence, the relationship between educators and students must have as its *raison d’être* the conception and understanding of an authentic education, and the relationship mirrors, or better, embodies the overarching view to education, within the experience of learning, that serves as the philosophical grounding of and scaffolding for the curriculum (Bonnett, 1996). The context of that relationship, which is a world grounded in *translation* and *transcendence*, is related to *Bildung* as previously introduced and should be guided and directed by “poetic” activity. Heidegger (1977) states that *poiesis* denotes a “bringing forth” of something in conjunction with a foreknowing, as in the case of the work of art, which is brought forth as work (*ergon*) through a process of “making” (poetics) guided in advance by a foreknowing (*techne*). In the case of the “poetic” pupil-teacher relationship, in terms of dialogue and social intercourse, most specifically, through acts of hermeneutic interpretation, “learning” is really an informed “aesthetic” making, a bringing into existence a form of understanding that is in turn instrumental in bringing forth, or engendering, the transformation of the Being of those involved in the activity. Thus, this occurrence relates to what I have stated about *Bildung*, which might be termed “authentic education” in terms of the “formation” of the student’s soul or Being. Bonnett (1996) gives us insight into the authentic pupil-teacher relationship when stating that authentic dialogue is the “personhood” of the educator communing with the “personhood” of the student, moments wherein the ontological aspects of Being as outlined inform and inspire “the teacher’s desire to enable authentic learning” (p. 35).

The authentic teacher-pupil relationship grounding the lived experience of learning includes and makes space for students’ reflective and reflexive activity, e.g., it includes autobiography and the lived world

of the students emotional and intellectual experience as indispensable components of the educative process and is grounded ontologically in the awareness of *temporality*, *historicality*, and the concomitant importance of *heritage* (as past) and its contribution to our students' authentic and imminent possibilities for their indeterminate future as historical beings. This relates to Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic interpretation as a "fusion of horizons," wherein our development as humans occurs through the expansion of our unique horizons within interpretive acts that depend on the fore-knowing and fore-understanding we possess as historically rooted beings, which forms our present existence. To embrace autobiography, in terms of the student's unique intellectual and emotional life-story, as integral to the process of learning, opens opportunities and possibilities in which students acquire a deeper vision of things, and through the processes of *translation* and *transcendence* of the hermeneutic learning experience, authentic education might return the student to her "lived world" with a new sense of self-understanding. Grumet (1992) stresses that autobiography should never be conceived as monadic; for all self-knowing is "self-as-knower-of-the-world" within the world with others (p. 33). By embracing the contributive effect of autobiography to the learning process, we are already engaging in the communal activity of interpretation, a "conversation," for as Grumet states, "autobiography is a story that is told to someone," and every notion or sense of self is "necessarily preceded by a relation to another" (Ibid. p. 36).

When we bring "self-understanding" to the context of our dialogue with texts – or others – new possibilities emerge which would not have been possible otherwise. Thus, in an authentic learning experience, through the inclusion of autobiography, students learn about their own lived world and their own unique possibility-for-Being as it manifests in the authentic, communal world they share with others. Bonnett (1996) stresses that the authentic pupil-teacher relationship is never "driven by some set of detailed pre-determined outcomes, it must take its start from a sort of *listening*," in anticipation of the Other's, the student's unique voice, as an authentic "*response* to what calls for attention, a *sensing* what is at issue, what is 'on the move,' as it were, in an engagement with a living tradition of thought" (p. 35). Huebner (1999) claims that such understanding as described in terms of anticipating what requires "attention," of intuiting what is on the approach, is defined in terms of the educator's ability to

envision his own projected potentiality for Being as it exists in the past-present-future. The value in this understanding rests in its ability to allow humans to accomplish things that have meaning for their Being. This is a uniquely human quality of the [educational] environment and requires the presence of human wisdom (p. 141).

Envisioning one's potentiality-for-Being is grounded in an understanding of *temporality* and *historicity*. The so-called "presence of human wisdom," which might be equated with ontological insight into our *Being-in-the-world* as *Being-with*, reveals a vision of learning in terms of time and the past (as *heritage*). In this view we embody our past, as *heritage*, and stand out in projection toward an indeterminate future, which returns to meet us in the authentic present when our authentic possibilities, in relation to our past, are opened up for appropriation. Huebner (1974) states that authentic curriculum should be concerned with the memories and valued traditions (culture-language) educators and students bring to the classroom. The role of the past as *heritage* within the authentic learning process cannot be overstressed within the authentic teacher-pupil relationship, for it is not about forgetting the past, lionizing the past, or unconditionally accepting the past as that which is simply unchangeable, because it was once here, and now, is irretrievably gone. Learning is about "confronting" the past as our "living *heritage*" in light of our future, and if learning is conceived as our "destiny," then it is the authentic teacher-pupil relationship that facilitates our confrontation with past through interpretive activities, opening the potential for us to assess and reassess its worth for our unique potential-for-Being, to accept certain aspects while rejecting others as they relate and "mean" specifically and authentically to our life projects.

Huebner (1999) focuses on the teacher-pupil relationship as it grounds the unfolding of education through what has been identified as the *individual-world dialectic*, and he claims that the educator is at once "teaching" the individual while simultaneously aware of her role as contributory member of a community engaged in ecumenical "world building." Teaching lives at two levels: it is at once "the futuring of the person and the futuring of a society," which always includes "the evolving biography of the person and the evolving

history of the community or society,” and this is grounded in the individual’s “freedom to participate in public life” (pp. 37-38). Since we might imagine education as working to build our public world, there is “transcendence, liberation, emancipation” only when educators and students confront and interpret their *heritage* for “appropriation,” and for Huebner, this entails the “sharing of memories and intentions,” along with the “embodied traditions, the technologies, and the institutions that make up the diverse public world” (Ibid. pp. 39-40). However, we must be aware that this confrontation with our past as *heritage* requires that we scrutinize the types of issues to which this endeavor gives rise. Thus, we must ask with great concern the following types of questions: “What aspects of our past should be retrieved, preserved, and enacted?” “Who should decide what these aspects are?” “Who is either granted or denied access to the collective wealth of “memories” and values that comprise the past as heritage within our educational institutions?”

Huebner (1974) analyzes the various components of reading instruction as they relate to the student’s ontological constitution as a temporal-historical being with a “living” history, or *heritage*, and he demonstrates how traditional approaches to instruction ignore the ontological aspects of authentic learning as conceived phenomenologically, e.g., when reading materials do not fit the characteristics of the student population, “when the memories, traditions, and intentions of the educators do not coincide or fit with the memories and intentions of the students, power comes into play in the guise of manipulative activity” (p. 43). As opposed to changing the materials or the approach to reading, (subject matter, level of difficulty, choice of material), traditional reading instruction seeks to change and manipulate the student by implementing strategies such as techniques to develop “readiness,” strategies to “motivate,” and when these psychological interventions fail, the educator then implements strategies to “discipline” the student who is viewed as being problematic because she fails to respond to the aforementioned strategies. Thus, the educator in this instance is not facilitating the student’s freedom, her active participation in the community of authentic learning as one with a legitimate past or *heritage*, i.e., the student is excluded from participating in the continuous reproduction of the “public world,” in this case, the continuous reconstruction of the traditions and artifacts of reading.

Noddings (2009), in her critique of Adler’s *Paideia* Project, claims that the “Great Books Program” is highly constrictive of student’s freedom, and this emerges as a result of both the restrictive curriculum content and the method(s) of pedagogy. One of the most pernicious aspects of the project is its drive to “totalize” and level down difference, as it “elevates intellectual life above that which it should serve (the social communion of human beings), and it assumes an essential sameness in human beings and values that suggests, logically, a sameness in education” (p. 40). The *Paideia* Project selects a “form of education traditionally associated with an academically privileged class” and then “prescribes it for all children, regardless of home influences, individual interests, special talents, or any realistic hope that all can participate in the sort of professional life that such an education has traditionally inspired to” (Ibid. p. 42). In its desire to prepare students to be participatory members of the democratic society, it “sacrifices the first principle of democracy: In the pursuit of eventual freedom, it denies students any freedom whatsoever in the choice of their own studies” (Ibid. p. 42). In line with my concern, Noddings proposes that our schools embrace and legitimize “multiple models” of excellence, e.g., “artistic, physical, productive, academic, and caretaking. Standing over all these should be the ethical, for what we need far more urgently than intellectual prowess is ethical goodness” (Ibid. p. 43). In order to provide an “authentic education” as I am conceiving it, Noddings suggests that educators need to hold a “variety of [students’] talents and legitimate interests to be equally valuable” (Ibid. p. 45).

As the above critique indicates, when traditions values and memories of the educator and the institution are placed above the student, there is a “denial of the subjectivity of the child for the reaffirmation of the teacher and of those associated with available reading goods and services,” which include everything from the educator’s choice of primary readings, text books, basal readers, workbooks, assessment material (Ibid. p. 43). When considering such issues as control of tradition and the preservation and passing along of memories within education, it becomes an issue of equitable access to the past. Huebner (1974) poses important questions for educators to consider relating to the traditions that are bound up with our reading programs: What are we passing along to students in terms of traditions? Who is being allowed access to the archive of collective memories comprising our heritage? What students are denied access to those traditions? Are the reading materials appropriate for various ages? And, as linked directly to *heritage*, “What traditions

conserved in print are available to the six-year-old child in Appalachia, the Spanish-speaking six-year-old in Manhattan, the deaf six-year-old child in a school for the handicapped, the six-year-old child in the bush of Uganda?” (Ibid. p. 45). With something as basic as developing reading materials, we must be aware that “there are communal traditions accompanying print” (Ibid. p. 46). We must ask, “What communal traditions are present when the only print present to the child is that of one textbook in the presence of thirty other like-age children? What oral reading traditions accompany the textbook in schools? What kind of individual or collective memory, image, or intention is found in a textbook?” (Ibid. p. 46).

The authentic teacher-pupil relationship grounding the lived experience of learning includes and makes space for students’ construction of meaning or the development of interpretive (hermeneutic) understanding as opposed to exclusively focusing on the acquisition of knowledge. Learning unfolds in a dialogic counter-striving activity between interpreters and a text, wherein meaning emerges through a “fusion of horizons,” which necessitates the space for student autobiography, history, and *heritage*, and learning embraces the limited nature of understanding in contrast to knowledge, where finitude, incompleteness, and uncertainty are stressed above academic certainty associated with *positivistic* notions of education. For Huebner (1974), hermeneutic activity is a communal art, a “way of getting at pedagogical method and interpreting what goes on in the classroom or other educational places” (p. 47). It is central to the dialectic between individuals, their history, and world, and unfolds, to reiterate, in terms of “confrontation,” which he describes as the rhythmic continuity and change of the individual’s understanding and involvement with her world and others (*the individual-world dialectic*), wherein there is a reciprocity between educators and students, and the classroom is a place where the old influence the young and vice versa, “a place where the past as present may be used, interpreted, rethought, and reworked” (Ibid. p. 52). As Bonnett (1996) argues, the dialogue associated with hermeneutic activity is “poetic” in that it is grounded in “and thus celebrates *receptivity* and *participation*,” for it is an engagement that is “open to the call of what is there to be thought in its summons of individuals,” and it is “fluid and creative in that it is open to whatever arises in its interplay,” and it is conditioned by a “set of values and organizational principles of procedure which express a concern to achieve authentic understanding” (pp. 35-36).

In essence, the practice of all learning is “hermeneutic,” and hermeneutic interpretation is “the pedagogical process, is educational method, as in reading, which is in essence, on all levels, interpretation” (Huebner, 1974, p.48). In the presence of print the child is confronted with “something foreign, strange, separated in time, space, or experience,” and the problem of method, or as I prefer, practice, is to make it “familiar, present, comprehensible” (Ibid. p. 48). Engaging in phonetics is interpretive as an act of “translation,” wherein educators and students take “strange symbols in print and [make] them comprehensible by translating them into sound” (Ibid. p. 48). Through this “translation” the student is at once experiencing the formative phenomenon of “transcendence” (as in Gadamer’s understanding of hermeneutics), through educative, heuristic enlightenment, engendering the student’s becoming other than she is at present. The process of instruction itself is “communal” and interpretive, a “tradition carried on by communities,” and “whether by asking questions, establishing written assignments, reading to the child, or processing words for [her], is introducing [her] to traditions of interpretation” (Ibid. p. 48). When engaged in reading we are dwelling within a context of living traditions of interpretations that come to us through texts and the encounter therewith, e.g., even “various exercises in workbooks and independent skill development activity are forms of interpretational activity, hermeneutic forms that have been embodied in software rather than in social relationships between students and teachers” (Ibid. p. 48).

In terms of reading as a dialogic, transformative process, Grumet’s (1988) notion of the “body-reader” is salient, which pays homage and owes much to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the “body-subject,” which, in the words of Grumet, is a term for “human consciousness,” which he “invented to rescue thought from its exile to the vast, inaccessible reaches of idealism,” and this is precisely what Grumet argues that education has done to the student, namely, exiled, or alienated, her from her authentic embodied and lived potential-for-Being (p. 129). She is focused on hermeneutics as well and views reading, in straight forward terms as an “act that is oriented toward what the subject can do in the world,” body-reading is “strung between the poles of our actual situation, crowded as it is with our own assumptions, intentions, and positions and the possibilities that texts point to” (Ibid. p. 130). Grumet insists that the text’s meaning is not situated at an objective remove from the reader, in the possession of the educator or “critic,” but exists as

“potential” in the reader’s actual and possible worlds, as meaning is created and “constantly deferred [...] meaning never rests in the WORD but in our ceaseless rumination and re-symbolizations,” in short, or ever-evolving, ever-developing interpretations of the text (Ibid. p. 149). If we approach the process of reading as formative and transformative process, as in the notions of *poiesis* and *Bildung* as enlightened student “formation,” our “comprehension is made palpable and accessible,” not in terms of “answering multiple-choice reading comprehension questions on the SAT,” but rather through the perception and visceral response of the reader in communion with “the perception and response of other readers,” which is a practice grounded in the reader’s “lived world” and embodied consciousness (Ibid. p. 149).

The reader, according to Grumet, much like the ancient priest practicing *exstispicy* (the diving of entrails), “pores over the text” in such a way as to seek “signs of how to live,” for she views “reading” as the fundamental human activity that is a “practical necessity, the exploration of a world where we can live” (Ibid. pp. 132-133). The process of reading is linked with notions of uncertainty and ambiguity, which are inextricably bound up with the meaning-making process, for since reading is a “bridging of the gap between private and public worlds,” its primary “purpose is not to reduce mystery to what is obvious, patent, or to confirm solipsism but to provide passage between the images, impulses, and glimpses of meaning that constitute Being in the world and our encoded representations of that world” (Ibid. pp. 135-136). There is also a danger associated with reading, conceived in terms of *translation* and *transcendence* of hermeneutic interpretation, which requires that the “reader give oneself over to the text,” and to do so is to “relinquish the world in order to have the world, it is a birth and death” (Ibid. p. 136). As previously stated, reading is a communal endeavor, a mediated activity that never smacks of solitude or subjectivism, for even when reading seeks to be a “refuge from society, friends, from parents, they are there, hovering on the other side of the door” (Ibid. p. 140).

As stated, there is an undeniable “difficulty,” “unsettledness,” “unquiet,” and “danger” bound up with hermeneutic interpretation, e.g., the *aporetic* aspects of the early Platonic dialogues, and this is expressed in the tradition’s understanding of interpretation as an ongoing practice (Gadamer 1989, 1990; Jardine 1992; Smith 1991; Zuckert 1996; Davey 2005). As stated, the form of “knowledge,” as understanding (insight) that emerges from philosophical hermeneutics is not verifiable through traditional epistemological means, for “unlike reason, understanding does not seek wholeness or completeness but ever-new interpretive relations [...] becoming whole and complete would involve understanding stepping outside the ever-changing between the withheld [concealedness-untruth] and the disclosed relationships that constitute its Being” (Davey, 2005, pp. 183-184). Zuckert (1996) explains, in her reading of Gadamer that the dialectic inquiry in which “Socrates engaged with his interlocutors were both literally and in principle unending,” this because of “the finitude of human existence and hence knowledge,” which makes a complete understanding an impossibility (p. 78). This poses a problem within education and curriculum studies, as Jardine (1992) points out, for in education “technical images of inquiry have come to hold sway, and we have become inundated with research that is aimed at pinning down the life of the developing child in such a way that, in the end, nothing more needs to be said” (p. 117). Education demonstrates a frantic sense of being out-of-control without knowledge that provides foundations, firm epistemological ground. For example, Smith (1991) reasons that the “critical tradition” and the “tradition of consciousness” in educational philosophy share the desire in getting things “right,” which presupposes that truth is objective and that it can be acquired via the application of the one correct methodology, hence there is a war between traditions, over who has privileged access and right to those things taken as truth (p. 197). But, as Smith points out,

Hermes [hermeneutics] is neither concerned to make a word mean one thing and one thing only, nor is only one preconceived way of doing things the only way. The hermeneutic imagination constantly asks for what is at work in particular ways of speaking and acting in order to facilitate an ever-deepening appreciation of that wholeness and integrity of the world which must be present for thought and action to be possible at all (Ibid. p. 197).

To continue this point, Jardine (1992) calls for education to embrace all that is “difficult” about understanding our lives and world to focus on the “dispossession of understanding from its methodologically prepared self-security,” in order to “return inquiry in education to the original, serious, and

difficult interpretive play in which we live our lives together with children; it returns inquiry to the need and possibility of true conversation,” with all the inherent dangers that the language we embrace to communicate our lives invariably carries (p. 124). Bonnett (1996), in a similar manner, draws on the inherently risky nature of all forms of authentic education, and states that the educator attuned to the student’s potential-for-Being never “takes over the task of learning from the student, which is fraught with difficulty in order to offer easy answers, or hands over solutions in advance of the experience” of learning, at a remove from the unfolding of the educative discourse in the classroom (p. 28). Hermeneutics resists the desire for finality, completeness, and control; it renounces the lust to reduce the power of language to functioning and meaning in a singular, linear fashion and recovers the view of life as inherently problematic, mysterious, question-worthy, and difficult. Necessarily, the very nature of hermeneutic interpretation “prevents understanding from ever completing its task,” because there is the recognition and enlightenment that its task, *as* authentic task, “can never be fulfilled” (Davey, 2005, p. 13). And, certainly, this notion of “difficulty” or the impossibility of ever securing a single correct interpretation relates to the profundity of literature and the arts, for the power of literature *as* art lies inherently in its ability not only to mean in a multiplicity of ways to a variety of individuals and communities, but as well, to cut across cultural and religious boundaries in ways that “analytic” philosophical texts fail to accomplish (Heidegger 1971; Gadamer 1989; Greene 1995; Nussbaum 2001).

The authentic teacher-pupil relationship grounding the experience of authentic education unfolds within a communal environment dedicated to the respectful and charitable task of learning, which includes creating and sustaining a creative and ethical dwelling. A phenomenological picture of the human and world is complex, containing a multiplicity of perspectives and situations, where the needs, wants, and desires of the human play out in manifold and diverse ways. Just as one cannot divorce epistemology from its ontological grounds, educators can not simply subscribe to the “fact-value distinction” when it comes to teaching curriculum content, for experiencing and understanding the values that emerge through our educative endeavors are as much a part of an authentic education as is our arriving at collective and reasonable solutions to the problems we confront. Huebner (1974) reminds us that when education embodies the reciprocal interaction between human and world, and embraces hermeneutic meaning-making as the “bridge between self and other,” wherein students arrive at the “mutual understanding in the conduct of their public affairs,” which serves as the link between past, future, and present, there is the phenomenon of a “caring collectivity in which individuals share memories and intentions” (p. 37). The world of education therefore consists of the individual, the society, and cultural traditions, or *ethos*, and for Huebner, we experience these “presences” most profoundly through “our hermeneutical and world-building arts” (Ibid. p. 41).

Clearly, Huebner is referring to ἔθος (*ethos*) in the sense of habituated behaviors or traditions that have been passed along as *heritage*, but within such an intimate relationship, between student and educator, we might imagine an even more primordial notion of what is commonly translated/transliterated from the Greek as “ethics,” and I suggest that it is found in the term, ἦθος (*ēthos*), which refers specifically to dwelling, habitation, one’s welcoming abode, a primordial way of *Being-at-home-in-the-world*. To authentically dwell “ethically” with others, in terms of ἦθος, while engaged ecumenically in the historical unfolding of education or “learning,” entails learning *how* to participate as a caring, solicitous member of a community wherein memories, values, and intensions are shared and debated respectfully. Understanding through interpretive acts, as a practice of *Bildung*, emerges only through the “mediation” of the other, who brings me to understand something about myself in a way that would have been impossible without this “mediation.” The conception of authentic learning as presented, which might be expressed as the “poetic” unfolding of *Bildung*, an informed bringing forth which is at once a mutual and participatory act of “formation,” has an undeniable ethical (normative) dimension that is linked to the process of understanding when learning. For example, Risser (2000) broaches the axiological realm when focusing on the communal aspects of hermeneutic interpretation and marks out the crucial difference between “community and mere association, that is, in sharing there is an opening, presumably between one and another, where the world becomes larger, not smaller” (p. 20). Thus, in addition to the epistemological issues embedded in the ontological understanding of learning, there are also normative concerns that relate directly to the pupil-teacher relationship.

As Davey (2006) points out, “Whenever I understand, I come to understand through the mediation of another. It is the other who (in the form of person, text, or painting) brings me to understand something”

(p. 9). Understanding depends on the context or “hermeneutic community in which the subject participates and through which that subject is socialized” (Ibid. p. 9). Davey outlines three key ethical aspects that emerge from hermeneutic discourse in conjunction with authentic understanding, or with what “constructivists” refer to in education as *meaning-making*: (1) understanding requires an encounter with the other within a context of difference; (2) understanding involves a process of negotiations and the respectful agreeing to disagree openly between participants in the dialogue, here respectful disagreement is stressed above the goal of consensus in discourse; (3) understanding depends on both the historical-linguistic traditions and practices we share as well as those which are radically different than our own:

The hermeneutic encounter grounds a civility among those who have come to know what it is to become different to themselves and who realize, as a consequence, that they are indeed mutually dependent upon each other for expanding the possibilities within their understanding” (Ibid. p. 12).

Risser (2000) deepens the understanding of the ethical dimension of hermeneutic activity by analyzing Gadamer’s unique appropriation of Aristotle’s notion of “practical Wisdom” (*phronesis*), which represents “the illuminative comportment of factual life,” and this practical comportment retains its undeniable “Aristotelian context of social life, that is, of ethics and the living well with respect to living with one another” (p. 23). Gadamer views *phronesis*, which for Aristotle is practical wisdom, a form of understanding-in-praxis that allows for the “good deliberation” of the virtuous moral agent (*phronemos*) always in terms of a “judging-*with*,” which represents a “judging informed by that which is held in common,” or within an authentically ethical community (Ibid. p. 23). Authentic learning emerges out of the teacher-pupil relationship, which evolves and develops in terms of a mutual responsiveness, wherein each participant plays a crucial role in forming, sustaining, and reforming when necessary the authentic context of its unfolding, which marks out the *originary* ethics of dwelling in the midst of “learning” as *Being-in-the-world* as *Being-with*.

Concluding Remarks

This paper attempts to offer an interpretation of education of an alternative nature to quantitative research in order to present a vision of what an authentic education might look like if we approach teaching and learning through the understanding of phenomenological ontology. This is not intended as a prescriptive recipe for designing, making, or implementing curriculum, or for that matter, organizing a classroom or defining pedagogical methods based on reified and indelible ontological precepts, which are grounded in the invariant structures of existence as discussed. Rather, it is my hope that in engaging this essay educators and educational professionals will find inspiration to begin to think in other directions that move away from curriculum models and philosophies of education that endorse positivist values, where pedagogical methods, classroom management, and the entire scope of curriculum is grounded in the view that scientific-technical knowledge is capable of providing categorical solutions to the problems of education and the needs of our students and favors quantitative research methods when analyzing the processes of learning and teaching. Within contemporary education there is a need for a vision for the design and management of a classroom that promotes, supports, and facilitates a rich and fecund “learning experience,” which ultimately is engendered by the type of teacher-pupil relationship that is conceived and enacted within the authentic curriculum.

Huebner (1999) views the type of human understanding I have discussed in a manner akin to existential thought, *meditative* thought, which he calls “human wisdom,” where “doing something” with understanding holds potential ontological meaning and might include “new exploring, more satisfying expression, deeper and more meaningful encounters with others, greater awareness of what and who [we are], and more ability to build and transform the world” (p. 40). The most valuable type of knowledge that education should concern itself with, according to Huebner (1974) is the understanding (wisdom) that facilitates the student’s transcendence, liberation, and emancipation (p. 39). As opposed to asking questions such as: “What *is* an effective teacher?” Or, “What *is* an efficient curriculum?” Perhaps we should be asking more primordial questions such as, “How is it in the first instance that an authentic education unfolds in its essence?” Or, as was my concern, “How is it that we are authentically in the world with others when

learning?” Responding to such questions, as I have attempted to demonstrate, holds the potential to afford us with insight and understanding as opposed to knowledge in the traditional sense, for it is not closed off, not categorical in nature, and it defies traditional epistemological modes of verification. However, as Gelven (1979) points out, such “ontological” insight, “is not a mere emotional intensification of attitudes” for one can learn about ontological issues in a way that is “both rational and non-arbitrary [...] and the more one comes to understand, the more problematic and more inquisitive becomes one’s search for a deeper understanding” (p. 80).

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