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The Teacher-Student Writing Conference Reimaged: Entangled Becoming-Writingconferencing

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The teacher-student writing conference reimaged: *Entangled becoming-writingconferencing*

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This analysis is experimental: we attempt to read data *with* the work of Karen Barad and in doing so 'see' teacher-student writing conferences (a common pedagogy of US elementary school writing) as *intra-activity*. Data were gathered during teacher-student writing conferences in a grade five US classroom over a six week period. One conference between a researcher and a male Latino student, a Student of Labels, is diffracted. Reading and writing and thinking *with* Barad disrupts our habitual ways of privileging language as representational. Rather, we consider the material-discursive practices of schooling that produce what comes to *matter*, leading us to reimage the teacher-student writing conference as entangled becoming-writingconferencing, speaking to the multiplicity of participants, merging of bodies, continual movement, open-ended possibilities, and anticipated transformation of *intra-action*.

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Barad (2008) asks us to stop: stop giving language so much power; stop with language as representational; stop the belief in the power of the Word to preexist and create; stop with our illusion of time as linear and always already cause-*then*-effect; stop placing our human selves in the center of all things that *matter*. She asks us to see ourselves as *of* the world, part of the lively and ongoing production of possibilities and exclusions, as *entangled*, as *phenomena*: as *intra-action*. Materiality matters, Barad argues, not as an add-on to language, not as a matter of language, but because the material can never be separate from language. Expanding on the work of Foucault (1975/1979) and Butler (1993), Barad (2008) argues, for a posthumanist performativity of which 'All bodies, not merely 'human' bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity--its performativity' (141).

Barad's (1998, 2007, 2008) thinking and reasoning stops us, leaves us gasping, working to reimage centuries of entrenched educational scientific 'objective' and representational ways of doing research, habitual ways of thinking, seeing and defining what *matters* in teaching and learning. We find ourselves diffracting the waves of Barad's theoretical concept of agential realism: shall we keep pretending we can stand aside? Shall we play when the tide is low in the tide pool? Shall we dive in? What are the implications of the latter? How shall we live as researchers and teachers and writers if we accept we are *of* the world? And a greater fear exists: so imprisoned are 'we,' the collective subjectivity 'we' of schools and classroom practice, in the clutch of representationalism, can we begin to 'think a difference' (Deleuze 1968/1994) with agential realism?

Foucault (1984/1985) writes, 'There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all' (8). And the laughing, crying, angry, happy voices of children with whom we work; teachers who bear the responsibilities of teaching in and through their bodies of a nation addicted to standardization; families who wear the materiality of US norms through painful realities; move us to a deeper understanding of Foucault's words: *we have no other choice*. We attempt this project as our 'experiential and our experimental' (as cited in Semetsky 2006), as a way of 'seeing *with* data' (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010, 536), to read the teacher-student writing conference as intra-activity, so as not to 'repeat the already formed and recognized' (Colebrook 2006, 15).

In this analysis, we reimage subjectivity as a collective of material-discursive practices, illustrating how students, teachers and non-humans intra-act, collide as phenomenon in a grade five classroom. Specifically, we analyze the teacher-student writing conference, a one-on-one teaching strategy employed to meet the individual needs of student writers. We disrupt our habitual reading of the teacher-student writing conference as a 'teacher' – 'student' – 'conference,' as a two-way street of clear communication, as 'teacher-directed' pedagogy; instead, reading for the 'material dynamics of intra-activity' (Barad 2007, 141). We honor the complexities of teaching and learning, the materialization of bodies and practices, so that our collective 'we' as teachers, researchers and writers might emerge differently, so that we might live more ethically in diffracting the waves of US educational norms. We embrace that, 'We are responsible for the world within which we live not because it is an arbitrary construction of our choosing, but because it is sedimented out of particular practices that we have a role in shaping'

(Barad 1998, 102). In this analysis, we study such practices as they relate to the teacher-student writing conference in a diverse elementary classroom.

A theoretical mapping

Barad's (1998) *agential reality* recognizes that the:

> political potential of deconstructive analysis lies not in the simple recognition of the inevitability of exclusions, but in insisting upon accountability for the particular exclusions that are enacted and in taking up the responsibility to perpetually contest and rework the boundaries….it is an understanding of reality that takes account of both the exclusions upon which it depends and its openness to future reworkings. (103-4)

Agential realism is the ongoing reworking of boundaries that do 'not sit still' (Barad 2008, 135). It is a view of reality not 'composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but of "things"-in-phenomena' (135). A teacher-student writing conference, then, is *movement*. It cannot be captured in a three-dimensional still snapshot: it is desire, discourse, power, identities of human and non-human, *entangled*. Boundaries are blurred like a watercolor not yet dried, spilling, seeping over the perceived outlines of 'teacher,' 'student,' and 'writing.'

'The primary ontological units are not "things" but phenomena - dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations' (Barad 2008, 135). What is real exists out of phenomena or the '*inseparability of agentially intra-acting "components"*' (133) materialized as particular practices that make real intelligible. Writing, itself, is reconfigured: a discursively-materially moving collective where finding 'the' writer is enfolded in intra-activity. 'Manuscript' and 'author' no longer exist as a binary; there is no clear beginning or ending to the narrative. Material and the discursive, apparatuses, and phenomena are not and cannot be separate but are all a *matter* of intra-action: 'Material-discursive apparatuses are themselves phenomena made up of specific intra-actions of humans and nonhumans…what gets defined as a

subject' (or 'object') and what gets defined as an 'apparatus' is intra-actively constituted within specific practices" (Barad 1998, 105). What is intelligible, what is 'real' in the teacher-student writing conference? We 'see' a teacher and student sitting close, blank paper between them, and we read the three as two separate humans and one object, following a writing conference protocol, towards the defined goal of improved writing. But see how the previous sentence is laden with the apparatuses of 'writing conference protocol' and school expectations. See how the phenomena of writing is entangled with the collective verb subjectivities of 'teacher' and 'student,' and how the paper itself is heavy with school expectations and how all of 'these' are a collective, moving 'them' intra-acting even as 'they' become constituted within the practice of school and writing instruction.

Intra-activity is a 're(con)figuring' (Barad 2007, 179) of space, time and matter. The beauty of intra-activity is how change and the possibility for change, for *becoming*, is the very dynamism of the world. Ironically speaking, this is 'foundational,' in understanding intra-activity: this moving, becoming, changing, open-space, on-going (re)working of boundaries as enfolding, the 'sedimentation' of past and future as present, intra-playing subjects and objects as collective verbs diffracting, the 'iterative differentiatings of spacetimemattering' (179). It defies the linear nature of printed text and the confines of English grammar, the trajectory of reading and thinking in sequential units, such as left to right. It plays hide and seek with the concept of a teacher-student writing conference as a protocol, or a four-phase process proceeding towards an intended and known goal.

> *Iterative intra-actions are the dynamics through which temporality and spatiality are produced and iteratively reconfigured in the materialization of phenomena and the (re)making of material-discursive boundaries and the constitutive exclusions.* (179)

Each teacher-student writing conference is a moment of *becoming*, of possibilities. It is not just a teacher and student and blank paper performing writing nor is it a coming together of these individual entities to produce writing, rather it is 'reconfigurings/entanglements/ relationalities/(re)articulations' (Barad 2008, 135) of what is seen and unseen so we are left asking, Who is the writer? Who is the teacher, the student? Who produced this writing? What and who is produced and what and who is excluded? And now do they work, here, at this moment of the writing conference?

Agential realism: how does it work?

Critical to this paper, then, are elementary students as writers, the act of writing, and the product of writing within the context of school. A humanist view would hold these as separate entities. A student-writer, given an assignment to write, initiates an idea from within himself, then, following a step-by-step process, applies pencil to blank page, forming words, then sentences, then paragraphs, and pages of text which is viewed as the product of the student-writer. In this way, the produced writing is representative of what the writer knows and the writer's abilities to communicate through writing. Rethink this as intra-activity. The 'student-writer' is a product of material-discursive practices, or practices that are 'boundary-making' that 'have no finality in the ongoing dynamics of agential intra-activity' (Barad 2008, 139). The student-writer is, then, a moving verb of iterative historical, cultural, political, gendered and raced practices so who we see as the student-writer might be *He, Latino, and Labels of State* (*Talented and Gifted or Special Education*), and this defines and sets boundaries on the expectations of the *He/Latino/Student/Writer/Special Education* as different than the *She/White/Student/Talented and Gifted* 'writer.' The writers are simultaneously produced by the material configurations of

what is intelligible as 'school': desks, chairs (engineered to scientific norms of physicality); the clock keeping and marking time; and, the untenable routines and materiality of schooling that marks He/Latino/Student/Writer/Special Education and She/White/Talented and Gifted intelligible, different and real. The changing topology of subjectivity is always already diffracting the terms of boundaries imposed by the intra-actions of material-discursive practices. The 'student-writer' is 'not a preexisting subject with inherent properties' but 'a phenomenon that is constituted and reconstituted out of the historically and culturally situated iterative intra-actions of material discursive apparatuses of bodily production' (Barad 1998, 115).

Apparatuses are also materially-discursively produced. In this analysis, consider the poetry-writing-format as an apparatus, an instrument designed to engineer successful poetry writing. The poetry-writing-format is a published piece of pedagogy, a type of 'formula' used to prompt writers' ideas and guide them through a writing process. Materialized in print with cover, title page and copyright, it is a material-discursive practice of 'evidence-based' pedagogy. It carries with it the weight of authority: if followed correctly, students should be able to write a poem, to be 'poets.' As an apparatus, it acts as discipline, as a

> specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise…the technique that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible. (Foucault 1975/1979, 170-171)

The poetry-writing-format acts as a boundary setting apparatus, excluding other possible poetry writing, authorizing a particular kind of poetry, and this is further disciplined by what is deemed appropriate through scientific evidence establishing developmental writing benchmarks, along with trends for males and females student-writers, and, therefore, what is 'acceptable' writing completed in 'school.'

Yet, apparatuses are open-ended because they are *phenomena* and always in the process of intra-acting with other apparatuses (Barad 2008). School discourse, or the discursive practice of school intra-acting with the poetry-writing-format defines what counts as meaningful poetry, but the outcome is not predetermined. Potentialities and agency always exist as apparatuses intra-act with other humans and nonhumans. Likewise, objects are material-discursively produced. The blank page facing the student-writer is not a neutral object waiting for human action to give it form. Rather, as Semetsky (2006) writes, 'it is what is unseen…that in the long run decides what is there to be seen' (111). The blank page, in the context of school, is always already infused with expectation. It is the apparatus of achievement, of evidence, of data that will be used for or against the student-writer; it has a history, culture, and political past and future enfolded in its material-discursive intelligibility to teachers. There is nothing blank about a blank page. The expectation for what is appropriate school writing is well established through authoritative and scientific educational research resulting in developmental rubrics and norms.

There are no objects that are neutral: the pencil, the chair, the clock and the intercom for example, are all material-discursively formed; all are recognizable as the particular tools of 'school.' Fifth grade children do not use mechanical pencils associated by yet another material-discursive discourse as the tool of engineers; they use a sturdy yellow pencils, and this object, too, has a history, culture, and political past and future enfolded into the moment it intra-acts with Male or Female, Latino or White hands. And it is this differing that 'cannot be taken for granted; it matters –indeed, it is what matters' (Barad 2007, 136).

These material-discursive practices 'produce, rather than merely describe, the subjects and objects of knowledge practices' (Barad 2007, 147); humans and non-humans are subjectivity and are identified as 'human' and 'non-human' by material-discursive practices making them

intelligible as such. Literacy educational research informs us that males will most likely write action stories and females will write stories with dialogue and collaboration (Newkirk 2002) and this disciplines the body of male and female writers, influences the practice and expectations of teachers, the publication of certain texts 'better for boys' through an endless, authoritative, yet authorless practice and materiality that is discourse, the '*ongoing agential intra-actions of the world*' (Barad 2007, 150).

It follows then that these moving and changing bodies *perform* writing not as separate activities, but as *entangled*.

> To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entitles, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating….time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future. (Barad 2007, ix)

Writing entangled is intra-action. Despite common references to *the* writing process in writing pedagogy, writing is not a linear process, a trajectory moving from finding and idea to producing a final product. Writing as intra-action is not what happens between writer and blank page, but the entanglement of human and non-human subjectivity as phenomenon, open for the (re)configuring/(re)articulations, for agency and possibility, from which humans and nonhumans emerge. As posthumanistic performativity, the focus shifts from how writing is a mirror of the writer 'to matters of practices, doings, and actions' (Barad 2007, 135).

Barad (2007) writes, 'There is a vitality to the liveliness of intra-activity, not in the sense of a new form of vitalism, but rather in terms of a new sense of aliveness' (177). It is this aliveness we seek in reading our data *with* Barad, changing the topography of ourselves as we

write this research, emerging differently, so we might act more responsible as researchers and teachers of writing.

A 'methodology'

Context and data collected

Data were collected over a six-week period. During this time, we both conducted writing conferences with children in a fifth grade classroom alongside the classroom teacher. Data included: audio recorded and transcribed writing conferences, field notes, written notes from on-going data analysis conversations and written analytic memos. Children in this classroom are marked by labels of material-discursive power: *Male/Female; English Language Learners; Latino/a; White; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; 504* (a category of students established by the Civil Rights amendment to the US Constitution). Additionally, children are marked by intervention programs where students are physically called out of the classroom and given additional instruction.

The school, too, carries a label of the Federal Government: *Title One* (a school in the US with over 40% of students receiving free or reduced lunches). Eighty percent of the students receive free or reduced lunches; food is the material absent in their lives. The school is under constant surveillance (Foucault 1975/1979) and pressure by the State to ensure compliance with State and Federal standards for academic achievement.

Such labels have 'very real consequences for how those bodies [human and non human] inhabit cultural space' (Hekman 2008, 101). These consequences are explored in our analysis of the teacher-student writing conference.

'Participants'

We might say that the writing conference is between Donna, one of the two researchers/teachers of this study, and Esteban, a fifth-grade writer. We might report that the writing conference takes place during a poetry unit and that students on this day were writing 'six-room poems' (Heard 1998). But this would be a representational, one-dimensional account; an account that assumes Donna and Esteban are isolated identities in a world where communication is a 'two-way street;' a world without intra-activity; without entanglement; without a historical, cultural, and political past, present and future, enfolded; without discourse and material practices of power. Yet for the purposes of the required research-writing norm (itself a material-discursive apparatus), we identify these two as participants in the featured writing conference.

There is also the participation of the classroom teacher as the Teacher with Authority, the six-room poetry-writing-format as a discursive-material apparatus of authoritative pedagogy, the Blank Paper, as School Expectation, and Esteban's friends who engage in the writing conference – all of which and whom are not isolated identities or separated by categories of human and non-human, but collectives intra-acting. And so we ask, 'Who and what comes to the writing conference highlighted in this paper and how do they emerge differently from the conference? And - 'How does this *matter*?'

Data analysis

Barad (1998) writes, 'Producing a "good" ultrasound image is not as simple as snapping a picture; neither is reading one' (101). We might apply this to 'methodology,' a material-discursive practice of the apparatus that is 'qualitative research.' Data move. Data intra-act. Data perform: we can produce an 'image' but it will appear static on the page, blurry at best, and

difficult to read as it risks humanist reflections rather than posthumanist diffractions. What are data? The transcriptions and field notes taken by researchers in the 'field'? See how the sentencing produces separate entities outside of subjectivity and power, a researcher 'set aside'? Researcher, notes and instruments - all intra-act: all are data, and data and researcher emerge differently through the intra-action with the apparatus that is research.

To think a *difference* (Deleuze 1968/1994), we read our data *with* Barad, asking of our data these questions based upon her work to act as a provocation, to disturb our habitual thinking as researchers and teachers: 1) What apparatuses are in motion in these student-teaching writing conferences? 2) What are the discursive and material forces? 3) How is the past and present folded into this moment? 4) How do humans and non-humans emerge differently as we re-enact this experience through multiple readings and writings with the data? How do we as researchers and teachers of writing emerge differently? 5) What are the material consequences of our reading of the data? How will we live differently as researchers and teachers?

Writing, as intra-activity, is our mode of inquiry (Richardson and St Pierre, 2005). If writing is intra-activity, a transformative process of which the writer emerges changed, then ought not the 'results' act as a provocation to the reader to emerge changed from the intra-activity of reading? We have embarked on a diffractive reading and writing of data. Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) write,

> a diffractive 'seeing' or 'reading' the data activates you as being part of and activated by the waves of relational intra-actions between different bodies and concepts (meanings) in an event *with* the data. As you read, you *install* yourself in an event of 'becoming-with' the data. (537)

We are installed as researchers/writers/readers in this data. The question becomes, how shall research 'results' look, read on the paper to invite the reader to a diffractive and intra-active reading *with* the data as well?

We employ a form of narrative, a version of a memory story, not as representative of the writing conference, not as metaphor, but as a tool for un-thinking teaching and learning through a disruptive writing. Our claim as authors is that the following (re)told story of a writing conference is intra-activity, a play *with* language and data, intended to evoke and provoke a *difference* (Deleuze 1968/1994). Using narrative risks the illusion of a beginning, middle and end to the (re)told writing conference; but there is no beginning, middle and end, only the ongoing intra-actions of *mattering* (Barad 2007). We use Capitals throughout our writing to indicate a material-discursive authority, not as an identifiable and static source, but as a naming of an authorless yet authoritative power that is discourse (Bakhtin 1981). We also use quotation marks to acknowledge the limitation of pronouns such as 'He,' as if a singular, unified 'he' can exist. At times, we set aside conventions of syntax to disrupt the reader and the reading: for example, deliberately using a plural verb with a singular subject to denote the multiplicity of subjectivity. Doing so is one way of rejecting data as representational; it is a way of reimaging thinking and subverting traditional research writing. Playing with the narrative and the naming of the 'teacher-writing' conference through a disruptive writing is meant to keep the reader at edge and provoke a difference. Borrowing from Massumi (1992), the question of this writing is not 'Is it true? But, Does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?' (8).

Teaching and learning in the writing conference as intra-activity

In this analysis, a teacher-student writing conference is diffracted. Our responsibility in this undertaking is to 'perpetually contest and rework the boundaries' (Barad 1998, 104) of what 'we' see as teaching and learning through reading the data *with* Barad as intra-activity. And so the

(re)telling continues (its beginning cannot be located nor will it end here) with the question: Who comes to the teacher-student writing conference? What agential cuts are made, what becomings made possible, when we describe Esteban, the fifth grade writer, teachers, and the poetry-writing-format, and other unseen and unnamed beings and expectations come to the writing conference?

Who are 'Esteban' who come to the writing conference?

Esteban comes to the teacher-writer conference. Who are Esteban? 'He' are Male and Latino; English Language Learner; At Risk (of failure/passing tests/sitting properly/dropping out of school prior to graduation); *in* Poverty (lacking 'food security'); Academically Below Grade Level (according to results on standardized exams); 504 plan recipient (displays impulsivity according to norms for gender and age group; therefore, qualifies for this US label). Esteban 'designates an element of agential reality, a phenomenon that is constituted and reconstituted out of the historically and culturally situated iterative intra-actions of material-discursive apparatus of bodily production' (Barad 1998, 115). Esteban as phenomena includes 'those apparatuses/phenomena out of which it [He] is constituted' (115): 'his' body as gendered male, raced as Latino; 'his' student subjectivity articulated by Labels of State and Science (labels such as 'At Risk'). 'He' are constructed 'through particular boundary articulations involving the particular discursive constraints in the construction of the apparatuses themselves' (115). Such boundary articulations/apparatuses 'include' the work of biology to construct gender (Barad 2007; Butler 1999; McWhorter 2004; Ruffolo 2007), developmental norms (McWhorter 2004) and the establishment of a 'deviant' population through these norms resulting in the production of race, racism, and acceptable gender practices (Foucault 1976/1990; McWhorter 2004). School

contrived/constructed labels produced through science are entangled and enforced through state authority are 'Esteban,' producing him as a Student Of Labels – SOL: *shit out of luck*, as the slang term implies. Esteban as a trajectory into a dead end without appropriate State and School 'interventions.'

Yet the 'subject' of Esteban, according to agential realism is 'not a pre existing object of investigation with inherent properties' (Barad 1998, 115); is not a fixed being, not a trajectory with a predictable outcome,

> but rather a 'way of being' – a verb rather than a noun. The subject is an effect of multiple encounters that entails the history of the previous encounters, the present and the potentialities of the future encounters that might take place (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010, 532)

the constituted and (re)constituted of iterative intra-actions: the body of boundaries, exclusions and possibilities. 'Intra-actions always entail particular exclusions, and exclusion foreclose the possibility of determinism, providing the condition of an open future' (Barad 2007, 177). All that is excluded from the composite of the Student of Labels is possibility as 'intra-actions iteratively reconfigure what is possible and what is impossible' (177). The subject is not static, predetermined, but alive and of 'the world's effervescence, its exuberant creativeness [which] can never be contained or suspended' (177). Esteban is possibility because 'agency never ends; it can never 'run out'' (177).

Who are 'Teacher' and 'teacher' who come to the writing conference?

Teacher and teacher also come to this writing conference. And the same kind of partial description of the constituted and (re)constituted historically, culturally and politically situated iterative intra-actions of material-discursive apparatuses producing their bodies might be made. 'Teacher' is not an individual; rather apparatuses of school make this label intelligible. Barad's

(2007) description of a factory 'worker' can be applied to 'teacher.' A teacher 'is not a fixed and unitary property of individual human beings, but an actively contested and disunified – but nonetheless objective – category that refers to particular material-discursive phenomena (not individuals)' (243). The same can be said for labels of 'Woman' and 'White': the teachers of the writing conference are gendered and raced and positioned by material-discursive practices that make them intelligible, *real* teachers *of* society. They embody Caregiver/Mother/Savior/ Counselor and Guardian of Character/Disciplinarian/Authority: subjectivities that are *performed*, as a network of relations of human and non-human, as an effect of phenomena or the 'effects of power-knowledge systems, of boundary drawing projects that make some identities/attributes intelligible, to the exclusion of others' (Barad 1998, 106). Teacher is never singular but always already plural. This naming them as Teacher is 'at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm' (Butler 1993, 7-8). They are intelligible by objective referents 'constituted through the intra-action of multiple regularity apparatuses' (Barad 1998, 106) so the curves of their bodies and the unseen presence of wombs are pronounced and performed as the female and nurturing teacher (Grumet 1988; McWilliam 1994; Walkerdine 1992; Weber and Mitchel, 1995).

The Teacher are the 'real' teacher in the study analyzed here. Ask any student in the fifth-grade class; the Teacher is known by her performance: the placement of her name above the door; the power she wields to pass or fail students; to withhold recess or require lunch-study time; her steadfastness and the routine of her being. She is *the* classroom teacher, the Authority, the Eye of Surveillance (Foucault 1975/1979), disciplining and acting as apparatus, even as she are a collective, 'she' appears as the unitary identity of Teacher. At the end of the school year,

the student tests scores will be tabulated and the results will be listed *under* Her name, and She will be 'held accountable' for the success and failure of students *under* 'Her' care and tutelage.

The lower-case 't' teacher are the visiting researcher. Ask any student in the fifth-grade class and they know she is not the 'real' teacher: Her name is 'Visitor' indicated by a plastic badge worn around her neck. She carries with her an iPod to record voices; she will not be here every day, or even for the entire year, yet she 'acts' like a teacher asking the students to get out their paper and pencils, to pay attention, to get busy with the task of writing. She is introduced as an 'a writing expert,' and the fifth graders move their bodies in different ways when with her, hiding behind their papers in some cases, eager to share and receive a response in other instances– seeking affirmation of their subjectivities as 'writers.' She are, too, a multiple and changing topology.

Both Teacher and the teacher are intelligible by their performance of 'teacher.' It is not a new performance; it is the fact that it has been performed over and over again that gives it shape and substance. The apparatuses of School and Science and Culture produce this material-discursive Teacher and teacher who the children recognize. The apparatus, the discursive-material practices, mark the body and a way of seeing and perceiving classroom practice and thus what comes to matter as 'teaching' and 'learning,' and yet, as with Esteban, these are not foreclosed subjects but subjects always already becoming; this is not a matter of cause and then effect, rather the mattering is 'the sedimenting historiality of practices/agencies *and* an agentive force in the world's differential becoming. Becoming is not an unfolding in time but the inexhaustible dynamism of the enfolding of mattering' (Barad 2007, 180). Within every intelligible practiced performance of School this dynamism of enfolding and thus of a different possibility, a different agential cut exists.

Who are the objects/apparatuses coming to the writing conference?

From an agential realist perspective, the six-room writing-poetry-format as 'proven pedagogy' comes to the writing conference as apparatus. The six-room writing-poetry-format is a material-discursive production, a published set of instructions to guide students in brainstorming and writing free-verse poetry, written by Georgia Heard (1998), a teacher-poet (herself discursively-materially produced) who has 'evidence' of success. In this way it disciplines the would-be poet to produce a 'poem,' according to Heard's directions: Students begin by folding a blank piece of paper into six sections or 'rooms.' In each room, the as-yet-unnamed-poet is asked to recall sensory details to describe a memory-image (quality of light, sounds, feelings, questions) to brainstorm ideas for free-verse poetry. The last room, room six, the writer is instructed to look over the details from the previous five rooms and write a word or phrase three times for emphasis. Then, the writer uses the words and phrases from the six rooms to create free-verse poetry. As an apparatus, the six-room writing-poetry-format enacts an agential cut –'a resolution of the ontological indeterminacy' (Barad 2007, 175) of what is marked as 'poem.' Yet 'apparatuses are…open-ended practices involving specific intra-actions of humans and nonhumans' (Barad 2007, 171) so while authoritative discourses of proven pedagogy and published expertise discipline the poet through these apparatuses there is no guarantee of a 'poem,' according to the structure of 'proven pedagogy' since 'different agential cuts produce different phenomena' (Barad 2007, 175). Therefore, the six-room writing-poetry-format is (re)constituted and (re)configured, *entangled* (not just intertwined or integrated), through intra-actions with student-writers and teachers and other human and non-human beings.

In the same way, there is nothing 'blank' or 'neutral' about the blank page the poet is to fill with a poem; the blank page filled with the unseen discourse of School Expectation, Poetry,

and Acceptable and Developmentally Appropriate Fifth-grade Writing. No writing produced on

such a blank page stands alone, isolated, as a fixed moment in time. Barad (2007) notes of her

own authoring,

> There is no singular point in time that marks the beginning of this book, nor is there an 'I' who
> saw the project through from beginning to end, nor is writing a process that any individual 'I' or
> even group of 'I's' can claim credit for…the practice of writing is an iterative and mutually
> constitutive working out, and reworking, of 'book' and 'author'. (Barad 2007, x)

The poem a student writes has a collective past and a future entangled into its materialization, the

entanglement of human and nonhuman since all lack an 'independent, self-contained existence'

(Barad 2007, ix).

If, 'agency is about changing possibilities of change' (Barad 2007, 178), then the future

of a writing conference 'between' teacher, Esteban, six-room writing-poetry-format, the blank

page, and in relation to Teacher and other students, the physical classroom and still other

unnamed and unseen material-discursive practices is assured only of unpredictability: who can

know the outcome of such an entangled intra-action?

The 'teacher-student writing conference'

A 'teacher' employs a pedagogical practice such as a six-room writing-poetry-format, presenting

it to a 'student' who 'produces' a 'piece of writing' but see how through an agential realist

perspective, this cannot be a simple line of cause and effect, a sentence with repetitive clauses

marching towards a declarative end. The singular nouns of this sentence are verbs-in-motion,

'matter-in-the-process-of-becoming…iteratively enfolded into its ongoing differential

materialization' (Barad 2007, 179). Possibilities exist 'at every moment [they] do not sit still'

(Barad 2007, 181). Perhaps this is the wonder, the beauty of what we might reimage as 'teaching'

and 'learning,' even as it renders the phrase 'teacher-student writing conference' an impossibility: there can be no meeting between a singular-teacher and singular-student and conference as a singular-pedagogical-structure. Teaching and learning as intra-activity reimages any given moment of this conferencing not as a point where 'time leaves its mark as it were and marches on, leaving a trail of sedimentation to witness the effects of the external forces of change...rather the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter's iterative becoming' (Barad 2007, 181). Becoming...that is to emerge *differently*, or in Deleuze-Guattarian (1987), terms to *become-other*, or 'different than the present self' (Semetsky 2006, 3). 'Becoming must keep on becoming' (Massumi 1992, 102); therefore, each teacher-student writing conference as intra-activity is a *becoming*, an event of possibility and transformation. Although still imperfect, perhaps the teacher-student writing conference is better reimaged*, entangled becoming-writingconferencing.* 'Entangled' speaks of intra-activity; the use of becoming combined with a hyphen, of transformation; merging writingconferencing and maintaining the use of gerunds, signals movement and the inseparability of objects. *Entangled becoming-writingconferencing* is an attempt to reimage, not represent, the 'conference' as a multiplicity of participants (human and otherwise): the merging of bodies, continual movement, open-ended possibilities, and anticipated transformation of intra-action.

Anything is possible: entangled becoming-writingconferencing

One entangled becoming-writingconferencing follows: typed in italicized font, indicating it as narrative data, as intra-activity. This (re)telling is at best a partial and temporal intra-action of (re)telling, in which the 'property [that] comes to matter is re(con)figured in the very making/marking of time' (Barad 2007,180). The (re)telling is re(con)figured (yet again) through

the intra-activity of 'reading' by the reader. As an event entangled becoming-writingconferencing, it is remade through the 'past and the future' of the 'enfolded participants' the conferencing in 'matter's iterative becoming' (Barad 2007, 181).

> *'Esteban' (the collective) fold 'his' Blank Page once horizontally, and now into thirds, marking boundaries for 'rooms,' six rooms, each with a writing prompt: Room one - think of an image or memory associated with a strong emotion; Room two - look at the image and focus on the light; describe the colors; Room three- picture the same image and focus on the sounds; Room four - write down any questions about the image; Room five - how does the image make you feel?; Room six - look at the five rooms and select one word, a few words, a phrase, or a line that feels important and write it down three times (Heard, 1998). Now use these rooms to write a poem.*

> *'Esteban' hesitate. 'He' shove his desk, making another student lurch forward, a pencil flies across the space, the impact of fist against flesh - laughter: Student of Labels fulfilling the Expectation of Misbehavior. The School Boards of State and Federal Oversight in the Best Interest of Student Learning and Development have engineered the room, the tables, and chairs to discipline just 'these' students so they will focus and write and learn except the students can squirm and wrap the tissues of their bodies around metal, wood, and plastic in ways The Engineers of Student Desks never imagined. The students are playing with the six-room poem paper, making it into new forms of air travel, even as the teacher (the one with the little 't') comes with Expectation, followed by the I's/Eyes of Surveillance of the Teacher.*

[Identities here are inherently 'unstable, differentiated, dispersed, and yet strangely coherent,' (Kirby 2002, quoted in Barad 2007, 184). Which is to say, the classroom appears 'normal' through the discursive-material practices of traditional school perception, the habits of mind most known to elementary teachers.]

> *The 'teacher' (with the lowercase 't') knows the conference protocol, trusts the six-room poetry-writing-format: 'she' (all of them) have a history, a 'proven' track record (and this produces in 'her' an anticipated and predictable future).*

> *Victor, Esteban's friend, who shares many of Esteban's labels, including Latino and Male, is writing a poem about soccer (not futbol; not golf, tennis, or lacrosse) and teacher prompts him according to conference protocol, 'Tell me more – what was it like moving that*

soccer ball down the field. Did the crowd cheer?' while teacher simultaneously pats the desk where Esteban squirms, 'ignoring the inappropriate behavior,' encouraging the 'model' that is Victor. (Behavior Management affirms teacher: excellent behavior modification.)

'Esteban' (none of them) don't want to write a poem, 'It is boring.'

'Then,' teacher says, 'write a poem about poetry being boring!'

The Esteban who does not trust this every-now-and-then teacher eyes her: He (the one who is street-smart) knows a trick when he hears one. The Esteban who is labeled 504 'Impulsive' slams his desk again, simultaneously living labels and breaking codes of the 'normed' student. The teacher worries Teacher will notice: what will Teacher think?

[But look now, we have written this as if each body acts separately, on its own, independent, but this is the delusion of perception according to our Eyes Trained by Western Thought and Expectation – habitual ways of being. 'See' *intra-activity*.]

Esteban, eye the six-room poetry-writing-format. 'He' (all of the he/them), remodels this poetry house, collapsing a few stem walls, (re)configuring Room five (How does it make you feel?) and Room six, Write a line or phrase that feels important; write it three times:
> *I am stupid.*
> *I am stupid.*
> *I am stupid.*

teacher (her little 't' shrinking even more, dissolving hopefully into a void), 'Esteban, You are not stupid!' As if these words were the Word, could interpolate, through the power of individual will and produce being. 'Saying something is so does not make it so' (Barad 1998, 108).

Esteban, (all over again simultaneously living labels and breaking codes of labels; making another agential cut, setting in motion a diffraction, yet, who's eyes will see this differing?), continuing to rupture the pattern of imitation, employing Student of Labels to break the norm and the label, and find a place in-between, breaking binaries and Esteban writes again and again:
> *I am stupid*
> *I am stupid*
> *I am stupid*

[The Blank Paper, Pencil, and Poem Room Five and Poem Room Six, have a body: 'meaning is materialized as performance [the performance of writing], and, at the same time, constructed through performance' (Lenz Taguchi 2010, 155): writing as a performative act of many, an intra-action, a flurry of motion.]

> *SHE, Teacher/Mother/Savior raises the I's/Eyes'-brow of surveillance and it is flung, dart-like across the room to teacher who feels deeply feels the impact, the smack of disapproval, violation of visiting expert's role. How can 'this' happen? Teacher puts a hand on Esteban's shoulder.*

> *The teacher (the one with the shrinking lower-case 't') reads the paper, and the reading is intra-activity, and entangled subjectivities: she reads 'I am stupid,' and the words as waves, overwhelm her, name her: how will she diffract them?*

['Diffraction pattern: marking differences from within and as part of an entangled state' (Barad 2007, 89).]

A diffractive reading of an entangled becoming-writingconferencing

> *Intra-actively speaking: Who or what wrote, 'I am stupid'? (And who is reading it, anyway?)*

And of course these questions rest upon a faulty premise: the questions assumes an independent entity, a person or thing responsible for the writing and the reading. But this is not the *mattering* that occurs in this moment of intra-action: the *mattering* here is not a 'linguist construction but a discursive production' (Barad 2007, 151). Like a wave, the materialization of 'I am stupid,' slams against teacher and Teacher and this reconfigures the boundaries: teacher and Teacher when reading the words, 'caught once again looking at mirrors' (Barad 2008, 145), find first an indictment of themselves, reading language as reflection, rather than diffraction. The indictment is the material-discursive force of 'teacher,' the construction of who and what a teacher is.

Teacher or teacher would not feel the reflection of 'I am stupid,' except they read the

writing of 'I am stupid' as representational of Esteban; if teacher has made Esteban feel stupid and if Teacher has failed to protect and nurture Esteban, they are implicated as 'failures.' But such a reading ignores the multiplicity of subjectivities of 'Esteban', 'Teacher' and 'teacher'; it ignores the apparatuses of school and of the six-room poetry-writing-format, of materiality. It narrows a point of failure to 'a person' (whether Esteban, Teacher or teacher) and it is this kind of discursive narrowing that leads educational policy to search for a 'fix,' and a 'cause,' a way to make a 'better teacher' and a 'smarter student' while ignoring issues of labeling, constructs of the physical school and classroom, nutrition (or lack thereof), apparatuses of sexism and racism. Lenz Taguchi (2010) writing about intra-action in her classroom says,

> Every organism in the intra-activities taking place can be understood as acting from their own agency and responsibility…Any evaluation must include identifying the intra-activities taking place in-between other matter in the event including the physical environment and the questions and input of teachers. (175)

Who, then, writes, 'I am stupid'? *All of the above intra-acting.*

A representational interpretation of 'I am stupid' excludes possibilities. By reading the statement as declarative, as representative, Esteban remains snared in the grid of Student of Labels: he fulfills the expectation of the 'At Risk Student,' damaged property, in need of an school intervention that didn't happen. He is SOL, *shit out of luck.* But read the statement through agential realism and it emerges as a 'sabotage of the existing order' (Massumi 1992), as a space in-between Esteban (not the Student of Labels Esteban and not a normed student writing expected fifth grade poetry, but as a different 'he' defying labels) playing the game of school in another way: 'he' follows directions (write how it makes you feel; write it three times) and he does this outside of the assumed abilities of fifth-grade poetry writing; Esteban's writing as an agential cut of differing.

It might have been a great poem.

If we cut agency 'loose from its traditional humanist orbit' (Barad 2007, 177) then Esteban's intra-action with the six-room poetry-writing-format holds the possibility of an authentic poem of suffering, anger; of humor and satire (far beyond presumed fifth-grade writing abilities) – and is this not the stuff of poetry? Let the 'I am stupid' move, intra-act, and see where 'it' goes because 'agency never ends; it can never "run out"' (Barad 2007, 177).

We are not suggesting simply making another interpretation of data through an agential realism perspective, rather we are asking how we might re-live this event and understand it and ourselves differently. Lenz Taguchi (2010) advises,

> We should not think that we can know what is right and wrong *before* living and knowing about the complexities of life. Rather, the approach we need is an ethics that '*derives from living and lived life in the process of living it.'* (Smith 2003, 178)

In the process of living, in the enfolding of past and future into the moments of the entangled becoming-writingconferencing and the multiple intra-actions of writing this paper, how might we live more ethically as teachers and researchers? (Lenz Taguchi 2010).

An ending without finality

> *…since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath before a moment comes into being and the world is remade again, because the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter.* (Barad 2007, 185)

We emerge from this entangled as teachers and researchers more committed to living, to asking what can we do to 'affect something or someone in a different way in line with an affirmative thinking of unknown potentialities, rather than what we *should* do in line with the transcendent idea of a higher value to be strived for' (Lenz Taguchi 2010, 176). We can approach children

during writingconferencing knowing the event will be entangled, and in doing so, approach with wonder, understanding our actions will cause a diffraction, perhaps visible (perhaps not), to humans and non-humans: we can ask, 'how can our actions begin a diffraction of affirmation?' We can look for the power of material-discursive practices, such as the labeling of children that have real material consequences limiting what children do and say and how teachers will understand their actions. We can train ourselves against these habits of thinking, seeking potentiality and possibility in our becoming-writingconferencing, listening for a *difference*. We can embrace writing as intra-activity, not as a product of an individual writer, not as representative of what is known, not simply as a tool for clear communication, but as a materialization of meaning that sets yet other diffraction(s) in motion(s). Rather than being tied to our 'proven' conference pedagogy as step-by-step process, we can see pedagogy as relational with humans and non-humans, as historically, culturally, and politically constructed, as having a past and future enfolded into a present. We can be *of* the present when working with children, looking for 'what emerges, what *can* become' (Lenz Taguchi 2010, 177).

The US is now consumed with the standardization of standards; of pedagogy; teaching and learning; teachers and children; and writing as a thing produced, as representational; we emerge from the intra-activity of writing this paper understanding how such standards might act as apparatus and materialize 'writers' and to better insist upon an accounting for the exclusions enacted by this practice, even as we perpetually contest and rework boundaries of it (Barad 1998).

While we have argued in this paper that 'teacher' is always already a plural and collective noun, it does not mean that living as *becoming*-teacher cannot at times be a lonely pursuit. The teacher wears the materiality of accountability on her body – exhaustion at the end of the day felt deeply in clinched and weary muscles and mind. Yet we find agential realism to be hopeful,

intra-vigorating, emerging through intra-action, anticipating diffraction, knowing the world is moment-by-moment remade, trusting the Verbs in-motion (human and non-human) in our classrooms, leaving off binaries of failure/success; mistakes/correctness for *transformation*. This allows us as teachers and researchers to think *differently*, gives possibilities to the Student of Labels to break the code that binds, gives way to joy, to the evolution of us all, to the entanglement of *becoming*.

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