

# Give Me Space: The Importance of Distance for Relation in Education

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### **Abstract:**

*The very nature of meaningful investigation in education may require us to, ironically, become further removed or distanced from our object of study. Intense contemplation ultimately gives way to analysis and separation - distance amongst ideas—in order for us to more deeply understand the ideas themselves. In classrooms, separation is inevitable between teachers and students, as they are frequently distanced through various pedagogical and social power structures. In general, as linguistic beings, we are often paradoxically separated and distanced through our own “common” language. But space, distance or a gap between observer and observed; contemplator and contemplated; self and other; educator and student is necessary. In fact, identity and understanding may arise out of or in the space and distance between us—somewhere between the strange and familiar. This paper examines these ideas of space in education in the context of relations between students and teachers; relations with language; and the particular significance of relations with the strange.*

### **Key Words:**

Distance, space, relation, education, stranger.

## Introduction

*By opening the door just a crack on Hallowe'en night, each of the homes so labelled during the year allowed us to see that they were really not too different from us. But after that night of trick or treating, the labels would go back and we would steer clear of the requisite houses, but with a slightly modified and mediated understanding. Trick or treating was a night ripe with the relation of strangers...This one night a year, our community connected through ways that went far beyond candy (p. 80).*

*After hugging and high-fiving my son, without even a second thought, I turned to the weird guy sitting next to me...I was hugging a complete stranger...We were sharing in the moment...two complete strangers from very different backgrounds who came together for a moment in time and who would never see each other again. We were strangers, but in a unique way, we were intimates because of the lived experience we had shared (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 80).*

Jaylyne Hutchinson's (2004) recounting of the irony of trick-or-treating on Hallowe'en night, and her moving yet equally ironic encounter at a Seattle Mariners' baseball game as the home team scores a run, both express the mysterious, complicated nature of relation amongst human beings. Similar events recently occurred in Vancouver, British Columbia during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. Extensive media coverage captured the communal, familial moments where strangers from other countries, sometimes strangers within our own country and neighbourhoods, met and shared intimate moments with one another because of a shared experience. Thousands of strangers gathered, for example, at David Lam Park in the city of Vancouver to watch the gold medal game of men's hockey. As Sidney Crosby scored the winning goal in overtime to clinch Canada's first "at-home-win," exchanges of high-fives, emotional embraces, kisses and tears were common amongst people who had never met before and would never meet again. Behaviours normally reserved for family and loved ones, were warmly extended to everyone in a strangely natural and genuine fashion. Discrimination was temporarily suspended. Race, gender, age and economic status were oddly irrelevant. The space between the familiar and the strange diminished for a brief period of three weeks when the focus was a series of sporting events. The city witnessed acts of kindness and deep, human relations characteristic of anything but what one would expect amongst strangers.

Such curious relations with strangers connect to our relations in education within our own classrooms and staff rooms. How is it that teachers and students who spend so much time with one another, and who have very little physical space between them remain essentially strangers to one another? Why is this the case when we are clearly capable of extending ourselves in an intimate manner to people whom we have never met? It is as though the vast space between stranger and self is what allows us to be closer and more connected, while the very limited space between educator and student or between educator and colleague impedes the connection. The cliché expressions, "familiarity breeds contempt" and "opposites attract" are somewhat instructive here. That is, what becomes common or too familiar perhaps becomes so because of a lack

of relational space. As a consequence, a relation might stultify. That which is opposite or at least strange and unfamiliar, can draw us in closer to one another, because of an abundance of relational space. As a consequence, a relation might flourish.

For the purposes of this particular exploration, the term space is narrowly used to explain the elusive area “between” individuals in an encounter—an area that Hans-Georg Gadamer (1999) describes as “a space that cannot be grasped intellectually” (p. 61). The term relation is narrowly used to explain the similarly elusive experience between individuals in an encounter—an experience that Gadamer describes as “the being of a person... fundamentally determined in its mode of being through the relationships in which it stands to other people” (p. 61).

### Space for Relation

Meaningful investigation in education often requires a student to engage in analyzing, separating, categorizing, differentiating and classifying. Such acts are undertaken to understand and appreciate a subject, a person, an idea or another perspective. Interestingly, while engaging in these acts, a student can become increasingly removed or distanced from her object of study. True *relation with* and *contemplation of* anything quickly gives way to *investigation*. As Martin Buber (1970) explains how brief an encounter, a relation or a contemplation really is: “[g]enuine contemplation never lasts long; the natural being that only now revealed itself to me in the mystery of reciprocity has again become describable, analyzable, classifiable” (p. 68). By describing, analyzing and classifying, one can unintentionally isolate oneself from a thing, idea or person. By focusing on and magnifying what is different or strange, distance is inevitable and when noting differences, one is always at risk of distancing oneself *too much* - particularly in trying to maintain objectivity. But distance or a gap between observer and the observed; contemplator and the contemplated; self and other; educator and student are necessary. This necessity of distance is described by Gert Biesta (2004) as he notes,

...the gap between the teacher and the student is not something that should be overcome, because it is this very gap that makes communication—and hence education—possible...education exists only in and through the communicative interaction between the teacher and the learner...it doesn't exist in any other sense than as a relation and “in relation”... there is no relation in education without the separation brought about by the gap (p. 13).

While some educators might understandably assume that the distance or space between student and educator must be overcome for education to occur, Biesta maintains that this distance is necessary in order for *relation* to occur, so *that* education can occur. Separateness, indeed, is vital for communication to take place. For if there were no “other” separate from self, from whom or from what is one to learn? There is a delicate balance to be maintained, however, as too much space can create a sense of isolation or strangeness, and too little space can mar the relation, inhibit communication and thus the possibility of education. Can one respect the need for distance in education while simultaneously ensuring that neither too much nor too little space prevents it? Perhaps by simply drawing the mind's attention to the issue, one can more deeply understand it. Rather than overcoming a gap or mending separation, we can

instead *accept* that there is necessary space between us, while still appreciating and pursuing our connectedness with other things, ideas and persons.

Loewenstein (1994) offers important psychological insights to the discussion of space in education, suggesting that a gap is *required* for one to be *curious*. Referring to an “information gap” as the space that “...refers to a discrepancy between what one knows and what one wishes to know” (p. 93), Loewenstein describes how such a gap promotes,

...curiosity [which] will arise spontaneously when situational factors alert an individual to the existence of an information gap in a particular domain. This can occur either because the gap itself becomes salient or because the information set as a whole becomes salient and the individual recognizes that information is missing from the set” (p. 91).

Such curiosity, created by an information gap, might further encourage an individual to pursue an idea, a perspective, or perhaps a deeper relation with another. These relations, brought about through curiously attempting to fill the information gap, may create a developing understanding of self and identity. As Loewenstein writes, “...in some cases, another person's information set may become sufficiently salient to establish an informational reference point for oneself” (p. 91).

The importance of distance and space for relation and their relevance to education is also supported in Connectivism theory. Difference, strangeness and strangers are arguably integral in learning and knowing. As Siemens (2004) suggests, a guiding principle of Connectivism is that “...[l]earning and knowledge rest in *diversity* of opinions.” Further, Siemens argues that connectivist theorists understand that “...decisions are based on rapidly altering foundations. New information is continually being acquired...[t]he ability to recognize when new information alters the landscape based on decisions made yesterday is...critical.” That distance, space and the strange are necessary for education to occur, is appropriately summarized in Siemens' citation of Karen Stephenson (2004): “...[s]ince we cannot experience everything, other people's experiences, and hence other people, become the surrogate for knowledge. ‘I store my knowledge in my friends’ is an axiom for collecting knowledge through collecting people.”

## Space for Education

Cherilyn Pijanowski (2004) discusses the necessity of space in order for education to occur, as she asserts that, “[n]either the teacher nor student dominates the landscape. Rather, the relational space between teacher and student, student and student, student and curricula, and student and community commands attention” (p. 104). Like Biesta, Pijanowski suggests that education should not focus on teachers, students or curriculum but instead on distances, gaps or spaces that exist between and amongst them. Rather than understanding education as occurring when knowledge, like a transmittable commodity, moves from curriculum to teacher to student, we ought to understand education as occurring *in the gap* or *in the relational space* between things. Does education occur because a student has adequately met the prescribed learning outcomes and objectives dictated by curriculum? Does it occur because a teacher's

view of education has been implemented in a classroom? Both play important roles in education, but the purpose of education ought to focus these ideas *on and in relation*. In short, education is only possible because of relation. As Pijanowski argues about relation and relational pedagogy, "...education is possible only through and with human relations. In this lush terrain, therefore, the purpose of education, teaching objectives, and learning outcomes are one and the same: to form relations" (p. 104).

Such purpose, however, is often clouded by outdated views of learning in education. King (2013), for example, notes that the outdated "transmittal model" of teaching and learning where "...the students brain is like an empty container into which the professor pours knowledge [and] students are passive learners" (p. 30) does not support engaged relations with the instructor, other students or other ways of knowing. Supporting, instead, the Constructivist theory of learning, King suggests that the student should be

...at the centre of the process - actively participating in, thinking and discussing ideas...[while] the professor, instead of being the "sage on the stage," functions as a "guide on the side" facilitating learning in less directive ways...the professor's role is to facilitate students' interaction with the material and with each other in their knowledge-producing endeavour (p. 30).

King's description of the transmittal model is a good example of how *too much space* exists between teacher and student, creating an imbalance of relation and therefore possibly preventing education. In contrast, the constructivist model might promote more balanced space between teacher and student, thus *allowing for* relation, and therefore education, to thrive.

Playing with King's ideas of "sage on the stage" and "guide on the side," McWilliam (2008) develops these characterizations. By introducing the idea of "teacher as meddler," for example, McWilliam adds an important dimension to the discussion of space between educator and student. She argues that, "[t]here are a number of assumptions made about teaching that need to be overturned...[t]he first is that the teacher can and should be all-knowing" (p. 265). This is consistent with King's view and also supports the notion that education *happens or is created* in the space between student and educator. As McWilliam notes, "...[o]nce teachers seek to engage in pedagogical work that does not proceed from the basis of their being all-knowing, it is possible to understand pedagogical exchange as a form of *value creation* rather than knowledge transmission" (p. 266). Referencing Leadbeater (2000), McWilliam further notes how "useful ignorance" rather than an "all-knowing" on the part of an educator, "...becomes a space of pedagogical possibility rather than a base that needs to be covered. 'Not knowing' needs to be put to work without shame or bluster" (p. 266). The "all-knowing" educator then might actually interfere with or meddle in a student's education—intruding and attempting to fill the gap or space. Perhaps students are better served, however, through a relation with the "not knowing" educator, who creates an environment where intellectual risks are encouraged and curiously exploring the unknown is a classroom "norm."

While relation between student and educator may be *how* and *why* education occurs, there must necessarily be a separation or space between individuals so that education *can* occur. Interestingly, that which makes education possible — the relation —

- may also be that which, if at all out of balance or characterized by too much distance, impedes education. Relations between educators and students require a maintenance of tension - a balance between distance and connectedness or perhaps between familiarity and strangeness. Because of this necessity, relationality in education is complicated. Educators may try to balance, for example, the establishment of boundaries and authority over students with the development of a close, connected relation. Educators may sincerely believe that such a balance is necessary in order for education to occur. These desires may work against one another, however, and in the case of establishing boundaries and authority, such efforts can actually magnify the differences between student and educator, thus focusing the relation on separateness and otherness. Further, distance may interfere with positive relation by preventing a sense of connectedness or familiarity wherein student and educator come to know one another personally as individuals. As Barbara Stengel (2004) writes of students, "...[w]e want them to stretch beyond our capability to respond. This will not happen until they come to know us and we come to know them. We meet to learn. Our meeting, our relations, matter" (p. 152).

King's (2013) characterization of "the sage on the stage" versus the "guide on the side," along with McWilliam's characterization of "teacher as meddler" illuminate distinct differences in the space between student and educator. "The sage on the stage," for example, creates space and separation connoting dominator-submitter; superior-inferior; master-servant; and leader-follower, all of which can interfere with and even inhibit education. "Teacher as meddler" *fills* the space between student and educator, and interferes with *students'* abilities to co-create knowledge. When such "models" characterize the student-educator relation, a student may disengage from a lesson, retreat from a class discussion, become disinterested in completing a project or assignment, or increasingly see herself as inadequate, *less than* or isolated from her educator. While there are sound, pedagogical reasons for setting boundaries of separation and space between educator and student, it invariably sets up a sense of inequality. In order for education to occur, perhaps students would feel more empowered were they to view themselves as guided by their educator "on the side" - as equal to the educator, or at least as equally *capable* as the educator. As Jacques Ranciere (1991) suggests, an emancipated person can "...be an emancipator: to give, not the key to knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself (p. 71).

Respecting students as equals is challenging, though, particularly if the educator has a view of knowledge that students are empty vessels in need of *filling* or, in this case, educating. Alternatively, the educator could see the relation with students as reciprocal, one in which the educator may sometimes be the *student*, or as McWilliam (2008) suggests, "usefully ignorant," learning a different perspective or interesting fact she didn't know; one in which the student may sometimes be the *educator*, educating fellow classmates and/or the educator. As McWilliam summarizes,

As co-creators, both would add value to the capacity-building work being done through the invitation to 'meddle' and to make errors. The teacher is in there experimenting and learning from the instructive complications of her errors

*alongside* her students, rather than moving from desk to desk or chat room to chat room (p. 266).

This reciprocal relation - creating more balanced space between educator and student, as opposed to a hierarchical relation - creating too much space between educator and student, may allow for more meaningful, educational understandings. As Buber (1970) suggests, “[r]elation is reciprocity...[o]ur students teach us” (p. 67).

## Space for Language

Gadamer calls distancing and the overcoming of distance “the exceptionally dangerous characteristic of humans.” It is true that without distancing themselves from the immediacy of desire, human beings could accomplish nothing of wider significance. The fundamental agent of distancing is language. The distance created by language, the linguistic life-world, is what makes the human itself distinctive. But this same distance creates the “weakness of the logoi” because as means of knowing, words are not themselves essential to the knowledge they present and can therefore be misdirected or lose their original intent and meaning. (Lammi, 1998)

Walter Lammi’s (1998) account of Hans-Georg Gadamer’s thoughts on language aptly highlight the ironic nature of human communication. Language can connect and unite as much as it can divide and alienate. While it can be used to illuminate, clarify and reveal, it can also be used to harm, mislead and conceal. Language, as we use it in relation, may be insufficient to convey what we are actually thinking and feeling at any given moment. As Ranciere (1991) notes, “[l]anguage does not allow everything to be said” (p. 70) or as Alphonso Lingis (1994) points out, the problem isn’t really about coming up with the right words to say or having the ability to speak the words, “...the problem is that language itself does not have the powers” (p. 108). Sometimes words fail to capture the sentiment felt in a relation: “Relation vibrates in the dark and remains below language” (Buber, 1970, 57) or, language may inadequately express the truth or depth of an emotional, intellectual or spiritual experience: “Truth is not told. It is a whole, and language fragments it” (Ranciere, 1991, 60). While language may be the instrument through which more thoughtful, precise and meaningful communication can occur and perhaps, therefore, more meaningful *relation* can occur, it is nonetheless an incomplete and insufficient instrument through which to convey the depth of human emotion and thought. Further, while language can be used to enhance a relation when it is used to connect, include or unify, it may threaten a relation when it is used to exclude, isolate or alienate. As Ranciere (1991) concludes, “[p]eople are united because they are people...language doesn’t unite them” (p. 60).

As education can arguably only occur when there is appropriate space between educator and student, perhaps successful communication through language can only occur when there is appropriate space between speaker and listener or between writer and reader. While language is used to convey meaning between educator and student; student and student; administrator and teacher; etc., the *meaning* of specific words that make up any language does not reside *in* the words themselves. That is, words are neutral and it is only in a relation where, for example, two educators are in a conversation, that words are *given* meaning by individuals. More succinctly, the

meaning of words is determined by how words are *used*. As Biesta (2004) notes, “[w]e do not passively receive meaning, but actively *give* meaning to and *make* sense of what we encounter” (p. 15). Meaning is not in things, in words or in people’s minds but rather in the space or gap *between* things or people. To illustrate this idea, Biesta describes a child’s experience with a traffic light:

...the only thing the child cannot discover by means of his or her own individual experimental interaction with the traffic light is the meaning that the traffic light plays in the regulation of traffic. This is because such meaning does not exist in the traffic light itself, i.e., in the “thingness” of the traffic light. The meaning of the traffic light exists only in the way in which people use traffic lights to coordinate their actions...the meaning does not exist in the heads or bodies of the individuals who make up the social practice, but rather is located *in between* them (p. 15).

This discussion is relevant to education in the specific context of relation, as communication between and amongst participants in the educational community (educator-educator; educator-administrator; educator-parent; student-student; student-educator; etc.) is largely based on the use of language. It is important to note that space and distance between parties is *required* for communication to occur and for meaning to be derived. If words used in a relation are neutral or have no meaning other than *in relation*, however, then words are wholly dependent on interpretation. Obviously, interpretations between and amongst individuals in education may vary and sometimes even conflict as to what the written or spoken words during any exchange *mean*. Thus, while language may serve to express, communicate, reveal or unite (perhaps because of a balanced space between participants), it may also create chaos, division and conflict (perhaps because of too much or too little space between participants).

Considering language as it frames communication, theory and practice in the broader educational community, Biesta (2006) explains that language may be a reflection of a given community’s perceptions. As education and all of her participants can, arguably, be viewed as constituting a “community,” Biesta’s description of a “rational community” is worthy of consideration and comparison:

...The rational community is constituted by a common language and a common logic. It gives us a voice but only a representative voice. The rational community enables us to speak, but only in the language and logic of that community...what voice can we use if we want to speak with the stranger, with the one with whom we don’t share a common language? (p. 62).

To what extent is an educational community connected by a common language and a common logic? Does this inhibit its participants by creating too little space or too little distance amongst them so that they are *only* speaking and hearing the language of their own community? Assuming this might be the case, one could argue that the various relations in education may be *contained* or at least understood within an educational community. It might, therefore, be important to consider the educational community’s limitations on relations when it encounters oddities or *strangers*. Equally worthy of investigation is the difficulty that arises between the people in the educational community and outsiders to the educational community, in maintaining balanced



relational space, so that they are neither too strange nor too familiar; neither superior nor inferior.

### Space for Strangers

*Via another, a person becomes one with himself. The other...means much to the person, not because of the person's need or lack, but for the sake of his own self-fulfillment...The other is like the mirror of self-knowledge. One recognizes himself in another, whether in the sense of taking him as a model, or—and this is even more essential—in the sense of the reciprocity in play between friends, such that each sees a model in the other—that is, they understand one another by reference to what they have in common and so succeed in reciprocal co-perception. [This] leads to an increase in one's own feeling of life and to a confirmation of one's own self-understanding.*  
(Gadamer, 1999, p. 138)

Gadamer's description of the significance of the "other" limns Zygmunt Bauman's (1995) understanding of the stranger: "[s]trangers are those 'who do not fit the cognitive, moral, or aesthetic map of the world'" (p. 200). Emmanuel Levinas (1961) terms the stranger as "the other," noting that a stranger's or an "other's" distance from us, or the space between self and other, is strongly felt by both individuals, thus creating a relation. Further, though there is a powerful relation and experience with the stranger or the other, Levinas describes the encounter as privileged and in some sense, not "knowable." The ironic notion of the stranger or "other" is described in more detail by Jaylyne Hutchinson (2004) as she suggests that "[s]trangers help us define ourselves. I am not you and you are not me and that is okay" (p. 76) and notes that despite the differences between self and stranger, "we really are intertwined even through this relationship. The stranger creates a boundary, and a boundary is always a part of us." (p. 76). Space between the stranger and us is a necessary distance. It helps shape identity and define who we each are. There is nonetheless a delicate balance to maintain between getting to know the stranger and allowing her to *be* a stranger—different, unique, separate—from self.

The importance of space between stranger and self is highlighted in Loewenstein's (1994) discussion of curiosity about others and information gaps. As he writes, "[t]he relationship between curiosity and information gaps also has implications for social stereotyping... people possess well-articulated social schemata and...use these schemata to infer missing information about individuals whom they meet (p. 94). Using the concept of a gap, Loewenstein further describes how there is a danger in *missing* the gap between self and stranger and consequently assuming a racist, stereotypical perspective of the other. As he notes,

...one might assume that a Native American on a reservation is unemployed. The failure to perceive a gap in one's information, because one has filled in the gap automatically with a social stereotype, is likely to reduce or negate the amount of curiosity one experiences about the individual's actual occupational status. Lack of curiosity about others as a result of the failure to recognize information gaps may be a contributing factor to the well-documented resistance of stereotypes to change (p. 94).

We need strangers or “others,” and we need the space or gap between self and stranger to appreciate and embrace difference. Education needs strangers. Only with strangers can students be encouraged to perceive beyond stereotypes, beyond hierarchies and understand the relation with a stranger as a reciprocally self-defining encounter.

Jacques Derrida’s (1981) notion of maintaining difference and balancing different ideas are instructive here. Perhaps “others” or “strangers” *must stay* separate as well as non-hierarchical. One should not be “synthesized” into the other, for separation is desirable and necessary. Opposites or in this case, “strangers” ought to remain *individual* with space between them, and we should “...mark their difference and eternal interplay” (p. 42). Such ideas are consistent with relation in education where educators encourage students to value understanding “the strange” or different ideas, perspectives, peoples and communities, thereby supporting them as worthy educational objectives. As Biesta (2006) notes,

...It is only in and through our engagement with the other community, that is, in and through the way we expose ourselves to what is strange and other, that we come into the world as unique and singular beings—and not as instances of some more general “form” of what it is to be human (p. 67).

Appreciating the value of entertaining that which is strange or “other” and similarly encouraging our students to do so, is echoed in Cris Mayo’s (2004) work. She alludes to Socrates and the philosopher’s embracing of those who hold different perspectives, that which brings adversity, and sometimes creates conflict. As Mayo writes,

Socrates sorts through...obstacles to knowledge with interlocutors with whom he disagrees. In other words, he does not shy away from people who most doubt and disparage him, nor does he shy away from people whose practices he abhors. This, to a certain extent, might encourage a view of knowledge as that which requires discussion, dispute and adversity. Socrates views his place in the world as necessarily contentious (p. 124).

Like Mayo, Hutchinson (2004) similarly argues that learning about different people, communities, ways of life and perspectives is valuable not only in terms of relation in education, but also in terms of relation on a global scale. Perhaps encouraging unity and peace amongst the many strangers and strange world views our humanity enjoys, Hutchinson notes that, “strangers ask us to defend one another’s differences, even if we disagree them” (p. 76) and that “a pedagogy will teach us to live together as many strangers, to be different and to be at peace” (p. 76). Sadly, despite the educational importance of relation with strangers and that which is “other” or strange, in practice, we rarely achieve the most basic expectation of relation with another—developing relation with our students. Hutchinson further explains this problem as she notes that “[i]n best-case scenarios, educators work throughout the year to develop and sustain a sense of community in their classrooms and schools” (p. 77). Despite these attempts, however, Hutchinson concedes that, “in too many schools, kids and teachers remain strangers while involved in a common interest” (p. 77). One could argue that we have too much space between ourselves and our students even though we often spend more time

together than we do with our own families. As educators attempt to be exemplars to students in appreciating diversity, embracing a variety of perspectives and celebrating the uniqueness of others and other communities, we forget the most obvious relation and arguably remain too distanced from it: the relation with each individual student and colleague who is, and often remains, a stranger in our own land.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the paper is not to offer any resolve but rather to draw attention to a gap -- to the need for space and distance in order for relation in education to occur. As Biesta (2004) might agree, “mind the gap” as one exits the subway is not an instruction to mend, close or change the gap, but to pay attention *to* the gap. As much as the paper is the product of the writer’s imaginings, it is perhaps more aptly described as an educational relation with various texts and as an educational relation with the reader—a relation only made possible through the distance and space between and amongst participants.

In a composition of music, rests or spaces between notes are as significant as the musical notes. Such is the nature of relationality in education: what is seen, heard, read and understood may be just as significant as what is not seen, heard or understood. Distance, space or gaps between or amongst things might even be more significant than the things themselves. All aspects of relation, however, are necessary and equally important. They must be balanced with space amongst them -- with the right amount of tension maintained, so that unity and distinction may coexist. Space between educator and student, curriculum and educator, educator and parent, is necessary but with due mindfulness paid to the eventuality that too little space prevents education and too much space creates isolation. Relational space allows us to *define* one another while highlighting our *connectedness* to one another for understanding and for education to occur.

In the completion of the paper another layer of relation and the importance of space is revealed, as the reader by now has a relation with the paper and by extension, with the writer. The reader will undoubtedly engage in, relate to and relate with the very issues that characterize relation. That is, she will assess, analyze and dissect the paper. She will attempt to derive meaning, to interpret what it is that the writer and the authors cited mean. She will, after engaging in such mental activities, be less of a stranger to the writer, to the sourced writers and to the ideas contained herein. The act of composition then might be described as an act to initiate a relation rather than to solve a problem or mend a gap. As Maxine Green (1995) notes, “[t]he role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected” (p. 28). Maybe the relation the reader has with the paper and with the writer is to be understood somewhere in the space or gap between us. As Ranciere (1991) notes,

One must learn near those who have worked in the gap between feeling and expression, between the silent language of emotion and the arbitrariness of the spoken tongue, near those who have tried to give voice to the silent dialogue the soul has with itself, who have gambled all their credibility on the bet of the similarity of minds (p. 68).

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