



Bank Street Occasional Paper Series

Occasional
Paper
Series

Volume 2021
Number 45 *Welcoming Narratives in Education:
A Tribute to the Life Work of Jonathan Silin*

Article 2

April 2021

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Recommended Citation

Farley, L., & Boldt, G. (2021). *Welcoming Narratives in Education: A Tribute to the Life Work of Jonathan Silin*. *Occasional Paper Series*, 2021 (45). Retrieved from <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series/vol2021/iss45/2>

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Introduction Part 1

Welcoming Narratives in Education: A Tribute to the Life Work of Jonathan Silin

Lisa Farley and Gail Boldt

Issue 45 of the Bank Street *Occasional Paper Series* is a labor of love. It testifies to our love for Jonathan Silin, who for 17 years served as Editor-in-Chief. The issue is also a testament to our respect for the things that matter to him. We have designed Issue 45 to exemplify two commitments that have shaped the decades of Jonathan's career and that we believe will resonate with readers of the *Occasional Paper Series*.

One of these commitments is Jonathan's passionate belief in the power of narrative—of well-crafted story-telling—to act as a dialogic, interpretive, and transformative form of writing that makes clear that the language we use to represent knowledge can also create new ways to imagine the social world. While there is always more than one way to tell a story, we understand from Jonathan's rich writings that the *how* of telling a story matters.

So often, our imaginations are constrained by dominant narratives repeatedly told that govern the very recognizability of being: who we imagine to be a child, a citizen, or a person whose life matters. Interweaving the personal and political, Jonathan's work features narratives that challenge the normative conceptualizations of childhood and development that too often deny children's complex subjectivities, that individualize socially produced traumas, and that pathologize diverse loves, peoples, and pleasures. In precisely those times when words congeal around fixed meanings and disavow difference, Jonathan's work reminds us that narrative is the resource we need to reconnect stalled meanings with the fluidity of experiences, voices, and relationships that have the potential to animate and exceed what we thought we knew.

The second commitment at the heart of Jonathan's work is his devotion to nurturing intergenerational relationships for creating conditions that can welcome newcomers into the extant world. Jonathan has inspired scholars, teachers, and caregivers with a vision of education and a practice of mentoring characterized by an open generosity and a nuanced understanding of shared social worlds of commitment and care. As Editor-in-Chief of the *Occasional Paper Series*, Jonathan brought these practices to life through his commitment to seek out and support the publication of richly storied pieces that centered historically underrepresented voices and highlighted the work of new writers, including practicing teachers and administrators, students, and young scholars. He exemplifies hospitality, welcoming new ideas as readily as he welcomes new colleagues and friends.

To celebrate the spirit of Jonathan's lifetime of work, in this issue we have invited scholars to tell us stories of education as hospitality, as welcoming the newcomer and the stranger, with all the complexities this involves. To create the issue itself as an act of welcoming, we invited a group of curriculum theorists who are newer to the field—scholars whose voices are emerging as powerful representatives of a new generation of scholars—to write essays. We then paired each of these theorists with a more senior scholar, who wrote a response to their paired partner. In inviting the senior scholars

to respond, we asked them to put narrative to use in welcoming the work of their partner, again exemplifying hospitality, creativity, and care.

Invited authors were told that their pieces did not have to directly reference Jonathan's work; some did and some did not. Regardless, what followed from the invitation to contribute was nothing less than a profound testament to the spirit of Jonathan's work, leading to inspired acts of support and generosity shown by our contributors to one another, all occurring during the extreme stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic. As will be clear, the senior scholars were deeply moved by the rich and vulnerable offerings of their partners and they responded in kind. Indeed, in one particularly moving act of reciprocity, when the cruel duplicity of Trump-era immigration policies made it impossible for one of our contributors, Ana Carolina Díaz Beltrán, to complete her contribution, her senior partner, Michelle Salazar Pérez, wrapped Ana in loving care, inviting Cinthya Saavedra and Paty Abril-Gonzalez to join in a shared effort to produce a piece that allowed Ana's continuing participation. It was an act that moved us and the *Occasional Paper Series* board to tears of gratitude and admiration.

This issue is made up of seven pieces written by emerging curriculum theorists: Nicole Ineese-Nash, Fikile Nxumalo, Tran Nguyen Templeton, Esther Ohito, Harper Keenan, Alyssa Niccolini, and Cassie Brownell. Each of their pieces is paired with responses written by their respective senior partners, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Debbie Sonu, Wendy Luttrell, Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, Jen Gilbert, Jennifer Rowsell, and Karen Wohlwend. It also includes one essay collaboratively written by four scholars—Ana Carolina Díaz Beltrán, Michelle Salazar Pérez, Cinthya Saavedra, and Paty Abril-Gonzalez. It contains a telling of Jonathan's career, by Gail and Lisa, and concludes with reflections on Jonathan's life and work by two close colleagues, Virginia Casper, and Deborah Britzman.

Photography and photographs play a key role in several of the essays in this issue. The reader will also find photographs taken by Jonathan's late partner, Robert Giard, a portrait, landscape, and figure photographer. Bob Giard was renowned for his own kind of welcoming and hospitality. In the 1980s, during the height of the AIDS crisis, Bob turned to photographing both established and emerging LGBTQ literary figures with the goal of documenting and celebrating queer lives. Jonathan made Bob's photos available to us for this issue.

INTRODUCING THE ARTICLES

Nicole Ineese-Nash's essay reminds us that the emphasis in Jonathan's work on relationships and narrative has always been foundational to Indigenous thought. Nicole tells a creation story of Indigenous "ontologies of relation" that moor existence in kinship structures that decenter the human-centric focus of Western thought. For education, Indigenous ontologies of relation charge both teachers and students with a responsibility to actively decolonize the terms of commodity, individualism, and control that frame colonial relationships with land and knowledge. Indigenous ontologies of relation usurp the Western idea that any one of us can claim to be a rightful host of "the places we inhabit." They remind us that we are "visitors on this Earth" whose responsibility is to restore "caretaking relationships to place" that can extend the right of everyone "to live in more sustainable and life-promoting ways."

In her response, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw tells a story that enacts the "ontologies of relation" of which Nicole speaks, while actively refusing a proprietary relationship to Nicole's story. Her narrative lays bare a "common history" forged between children and creatures of the natural world, one "that refuses to follow the colonial narrative," rendering squirrels as mere "animals that humans come into conflict

with.” In Veronica’s narrative, welcoming comes by way of the more-than-human world that “create[s] an alternative relational force” and should call us into sustained and collective attention to matters that live beyond the orbit of our own individual existence.

Fikile Nxumalo, too, probes children’s encounters with the natural world. She offers three stories of young people’s encounters with water that serve as, in her words, “illustrations of pedagogies that welcome young people into caring relationships with more-than-human life.” Fikile begins by sketching the landscape of “settler colonial and anti-Black inheritances,” which such encounters disrupt. In particular, she shows how human-centered approaches to learning *about* the environment not only uphold the colonial hierarchy that positions the human above the natural world, but perpetuate a highly racialized image of “a pure idyllic nature... to which white and privileged children ‘naturally’ belong.” In this construction, racially minoritized children are made to stand outside of “nature,” where they are subject to hyper-surveillance and deficit narratives of “underdevelopment and underachievement” that nature is then recruited to “fix.” The featured stories of Fikile’s essay offer a counterpoint to racist constructions by restoring the place of both Indigenous and Black knowledges in early childhood education.

Debbie Sonu’s response underlines her learning from Fikile’s paper by demonstrating how the stories we tell about human and more-than-human relationships matter. When humans are constructed as inhabitants of a natural world meant to serve us with endless resources, we are absolved of our “responsibility for its future sustainability.” Debbie reads the place-encounters featured in Fikile’s essay as narratives of both creation and futurity that “re-story the very epistemological frameworks that perpetuate the human-nature division” and highlight “the relational qualities of being” needed to “remake the world anew.”

Tran Nguyen Templeton extends this idea of relationships through a discussion of children’s visual representations of the worlds they inhabit. Her essay considers what photographs might reveal about how children construct a sense of self “on their own terms” that is, at the same time, shaped by multiple contexts and bonds with others. Tran’s piece shows us what can happen when adults risk letting go of their own claims of expertise to welcome children’s concerns, wishes, and jokes that unsettle school rules to pay attention, stop laughing, and “get things right.” Tran shows us that what matters to children is not the developmental narrative that adults tell about them, but the times when adults greet children’s representations of relationships, made from both “power *and* vulnerability.”

Wendy Luttrell greets Tran’s research by noticing the care that Tran takes to provide “glimpses of children’s shared identity work” and “make visible their active participation in care networks.” Together, Tran and Wendy shift the common idea that children are passive recipients of their worlds to show how, through photographs, they speak back against adult constructions—whether “negative appraisals” or “pet names”—that fail to notice the depth of children’s capacities and perspectives.

Esther Ohito draws from photography as well, but for her, images offer a portal for thinking about the relationship between childhood memories, moving emotions, and “social ills—such as anti-Black racism and misogynoir,” that press down on seemingly individual experiences pictured inside the camera’s frame. Esther suggests that, if family photographs “return us to our origin,” the memories they invoke are not always of our choosing or wanting. Still, because photographs “catalyze narratives,” they can be used to work through the hard parts of loving relationships that “we cannot, must not, leave behind,” insofar as they fundamentally shape who we are and who we imagine ourselves to be in relationship to others.

Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández meets Esther’s family photograph with an analysis of his own personal portrait. For him, the images “provide glimpses into our path toward affectional solidarities” across differences—between then and now, between there and here, between child-self and adult-self, and even between “Esther’s father and my mother.” Solidarity here refers not to sameness across differences—whether of generation, place, citizenship, race, and/or gender—but to a commitment to preserve all that is “ungraspable and beyond our capacity to understand or know” about the other. It is in this relation across difference where, for Esther and Rubén, ethical possibility emerges and resides.

In his own act of solidarity, Harper Keenan pens a moving letter to new queer and trans educators that chronicles a five-decades-long history of queer and trans activism to strengthen “intergenerational connection.” Against the cold objectivity that can sometimes fix history squarely in the distant past, Harper’s narrative brings to life the lasting impact of queer and trans legacies of thought, including Jonathan’s, on his own unfolding story. His narrative of welcome reminds us that queer and trans educators are not alone because they have been there from the beginning. In sharing their legacies of resistance and solidarity, Harper welcomes all queer and trans educators into “caring futures” of “collective survival” that can productively disrupt exhausting binaries, gender normativity, and compliance.

Jen Gilbert responds to Harper’s narrative by thinking with him about “queering” legacies of activism and noticing an ambivalent core in the generations that Harper chronicles. That is, efforts to secure the rights of queer and trans children are built on an unspoken legacy of activism that was made to abandon queer and trans teachers ironically in the name of protecting children from their so-called nefarious influence. Jen’s response links the work of Harper and Jonathan by underlining their shared commitment to work against idealized narratives of both identity and education, and to remember and confront the losses, struggles, and failures that comprise even the most progressive narratives.

While “Romantic ideas about forest kindergartens are one of the reasons” Alyssa Niccolini was drawn to Germany, the newness of the place and the language call her into a vulnerable form of literacy that “evades language” and invokes bodies, gestures, and rituals. In Alyssa’s narrative, the ticks covering the forest floor of her children’s school that “taunt” their bodies become a metaphor for thinking about the unexpected, and even the “unwanted,” as the ground of existence. The ticks of Alyssa’s narrative have no concern for the construct of childhood innocence that presumes to protect (certain) children from harm. Ticks have no concern for Alyssa’s shaky grasp of German as she tries to explain her worries to a doctor. Indeed, ticks might be thriving because of “human interference” warming the globe. Even as Alyssa attempts to abate her anxiety by “entomb[ing]” the “spider parasites” in a “cruel curation” of sticky plastic, she wonders what it means to welcome “the wildness of the world” in a generative, if fearful, invitation to learn from what we cannot control in our entangled existence.

Jennifer Rowsell responds to Alyssa with a narrative that affirms vulnerability as a condition of being in relation, and not a deficit belonging to those considered weak or failed. “Vulnerability,” as Jennifer suggests, “gives fluency to literacy” that “opens expressive floodgates” and dislodges the surety of our footing. Vulnerability obliges us to care for others beyond curative narratives that reinstall the fantasy of the adult-in-charge, and provided we let it, can “move us to new places.”

Cassie Brownell’s piece begins with a story of 7-year-olds racing through a school hallway and out onto a play yard in an energetic game of “Corona Tag.” Cassie brings together Jonathan’s (2013) observation

that children use play as a tool to “devise narratives that help them sort through their experiences” and that adults must make space for discussing with them the fact that “children, like adults, live lives fraught with uncertainty, loss, and trauma.” She documents how, as a new teacher in a second-grade classroom in New Orleans some years after Hurricane Katrina, it was in fact the children and the veteran teachers who made space for her, an outsider and a stranger, to learn how to live together and care for one another as a new hurricane approached the city. Bringing us back to the present context of COVID-19, Cassie contends that adults must “take children’s play as a starting point for the critical work and care associated with our roles as educators and caretakers” and that, in turn, children’s play can remind us that our imaginations may take us to places not previously imagined.

Karen Wohlwend, in response, describes Cassie’s essay as enacting an “ethical action,” performing gratitude, respect, recognition, and empathy in her descriptions of the children and teachers who welcomed her to her first teaching position. “Welcoming,” Karen writes, “is an opening of possibilities.” This is especially so when it is grounded in the teacher’s capacity to tolerate the vulnerability of not knowing and not controlling, when we embrace the realization that children at play can be “trusted and supported to work through the uncertainty in their worlds in times of pandemic or natural disasters,” and when we can welcome children as partners in imagining classroom spaces of creativity and hope.

The piece entitled “Enlaces” performs the enlacing of narratives of its four authors, Ana Carolina Díaz Beltrán, Michelle Salazar Pérez, Cinthya Saavedra, and Paty Abril-Gonzalez. Framed as a testimonio, bringing together their commitments to “women of color feminisms and how these ways of knowing and being can inspire anti-oppressive and anti-colonial imaginaries in early childhood studies,” the authors tell stories of linguistic, invisibility in schooling and in the academe, and of border crossings. They draw lovingly on memories of weaving done by their mothers and in their communities to describe cultural tools handed down “to navigate and maneuver oppression and life in general” and also to create conditions for friendship, joy, belonging, and powerful work. The work of Gloria Anzaldúa supports them in providing their testimonios as “a retelling or putting ourselves back together” that also stand as a powerful model for a transformative curriculum, an approach to teaching and learning that is grounded in the strength of stories that produce knowledge and pass along insights and hard-learned lessons.

Virginia Casper and Deborah Britzman share with Jonathan a history as central figures, as Deborah writes, “in the beginning era of gay and lesbian rights, during the AIDS pandemic, during key moments of feminism and civil rights, and in dramatic and sometimes maddening challenges within our field of education.” Deborah helps us think about how Jonathan’s work slows the “harried time” of education that can make us feel anxious and instead helps us to think deeply about how our earliest experiences of having been cared for by others return to adulthood as “soft situations” felt as “vulnerability, dependency, curiosity, and care.” Her account reads Jonathan’s work through a psychoanalytic lens to suggest that while development is rooted in troubling assumptions of normativity, this much-critiqued concept can also signal a second chance, or what Deborah describes as “a desire for weird continuity” made from “think[ing] on purpose with what chance has created.”

Virginia, in her account of a hike she and Jonathan took early last year through the hills above Las Cruces, New Mexico, writes about Jonathan’s latest work on legacy: “Rather than focusing on passing the torch to another generation, Jonathan, throughout his career, has enacted reciprocity through intergenerational dialogue, validating new voices and welcoming ‘newcomers’ of all kinds into a larger

community of thought.” For Virginia, Jonathan’s work and friendship have brought a generative and generous intellectual camaraderie that allows her to “plumb the depths of [her] own thinking as well as create a whole enterprise of ideas that is most definitely greater than the sum of its parts.”

We take many lessons from the magnificent stories of our generous contributing authors—gifts that we frame through the commitments present in the life and work of Jonathan Silin and that are brought to life in these pieces. We are filled with gratitude for the ways the authors welcomed our invitation, embracing it as an occasion to write things that are deeply held, that matter. They displayed a remarkable vulnerability, grace, and generosity. They welcomed the chance to engage with one another through their writing, the kind of intergenerational opening that Jonathan holds dear. It is our sincere hope that the authors will continue to find, in the ideas and relationships forged through this work, an enactment of hospitality that will continue to grow and nurture their spirits and imaginations for years to come. Even more fervently, we hope that readers of Issue 45 of the Bank Street *Occasional Paper Series* will feel welcomed into these pages, will find a sense of belonging here, and will feel inspired to extend welcoming and hospitality, love, respect, creativity, and curiosity to the children and adults that populate our world.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Lisa Farley is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto, Canada. Her research considers how psychoanalytic theories of childhood can help us think about the conflicted qualities of growth, belonging, and education. She is the author of *Childhood Beyond Pathology: A Psychoanalytic Study of Development and Diagnosis* (SUNY Press, 2018) and a collaborator on a recent project that examines how teachers' childhood memories inform their understandings of both teaching and children.



Gail Boldt is a professor in the College of Education at the Pennsylvania State University in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She is on the undergraduate reading and elementary education faculty and is the professor in charge of the PhD emphasis in Language, Culture, and Society. Gail is also a clinical psychotherapist and a fellow in the College of Research Fellows of the American Psychoanalytic Association. Her research focuses on how studies of affect drawn from both Deleuzo-Guattarian and relational psychoanalytic sources can inform the creation of classrooms in which students and teachers experience vitality.