

Pinar, W.F. (1994). *Autobiography, Politics and Sexuality: Essays in Curriculum Theory 1972-1992*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 278 pp. (Softcover).

William Pinar's book *Autobiography, Politics and Sexuality* asserts the validity of autobiography as a method of study in considerations of curriculum and instruction. By contrasting autobiographical approaches to rigid traditionalism that seems disconnected to life and teaching practice, Pinar continues his efforts to reconceptualize curriculum in ways that value the immediacy and complexity of relationships between students and teachers.

Pinar demonstrates that autobiographical writing provides the space for critical reflection, learning, and transformation of experience – the reinvention of the self. The validation of such personal narrative in curriculum research supports the belief that in order to teach well, we need to teach from our own being. This requires us to start the understanding and *knowing* process within ourselves in order to be able to participate in meaningful dialogue between people. Spanning two decades, the essays in Pinar's book uphold and develop perspectives on autobiography as critical praxis, using the advocacy of "working from within" to incorporate considerations of lived human experience into notions of curriculum.

In considering the numerous theoretical debates about authentic self, Pinar's essay "Autobiography and the Architecture of Self" considers authenticity, identity, and autobiography through poststructuralist concepts. The idea of reclaiming the self is explored through the investigation of educational experience, moving away from false or fixed forms acquired by individuals through the process of schooling as they educate or are educated. The strength of this collection of essays lies in Pinar's ability to illuminate the idea of the self as a postmodern, constantly shifting self that is at once political, personal, and sexual, inextricably intertwined with concepts of curriculum that are aligned with this living, breathing self. The book is unified by the chronological arrangement of essays that reflect Pinar's autobiographical method of *currere* with its phases of reflection or cultivation of an internal dialectic about human life: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical.

Pinar writes most eloquently in those essays which affirm the connection of human life with curriculum through his interplay of literary texts in autobiographical narratives such as "The Trial," "The Voyage Out," and "The Lost Language of Cranes." In "The Trial," Pinar refers to Kafka's novel

to illustrate the idea of curriculum as represented by autobiographical inquiry in constant movement, yet engaged in an elliptical progression that is related to community and to the historical moment. This essay explores Jungian reflection as it evokes an autobiographical theory of educational experience, envisioning life and work as inseparable, both contributing to the inner development of the individual. This view claims the importance of a commitment to the unconscious that forms and transforms the individual in the course of life, as it is expressed through work.

This perception is strengthened by Pinar's allusions in his essay "The Voyage Out," in which he uses the textual interplay of Virginia Woolf's novel and his own personal narrative to advocate a recovery of feeling, a sense of the body and of a suppressed primal self. The notion of recovery is linked to the political function of autobiography to combat oppression, the necessity to analyze our socio-economic systems, our hegemonies, and the situation of the self in relation to these imposed frameworks. Pinar asks us to consider our work, our scholarly research, our teaching, our learning, and our explorations of curriculum theory as "voyages out," taking intellectual and biographical risks that are essential to the vocation. As always, Pinar writes with a wonderful sense of the poetic, often disorienting us, challenging us to take "the voyage out" through autobiographical inquiry in a constant struggle for truth.

The final essay of this collection is Pinar's most eloquent. "The Lost Language of Cranes" recaptures the thread that unifies this book, the idea that we are in search of *lost languages*. Here, lost languages are the languages of love, family, passion, those bonds that make us essentially human. Pinar continues to follow his own advocacy of telling his stories in ways that move beyond the surface of memory, requiring us to dismantle habitual self-defenses. In this text, Pinar exemplifies his beliefs in multi-layered writing that is evocative, rich and poetic – curriculum theory at its best.

This essay intertwines multiple stories and metaphors: the representation of cranes, Chinese symbols of long life and marriage; David Leavitt's novel, *The Lost Language of Cranes*; autobiographical contemplations on marriage and love, and stories of father-son relationships. In this regressive phase of Pinar's *currere*, lost languages are recovered, recalled from the unconscious, various texts pulling us outward to the imagined worlds while moving us inward reflexively to where we meet the text in our own stories. This is Pinar's gift and his strength: his ability to engage us passionately with his poetic texts in ways that evoke a connectedness to the human spirit. His texts are about collapsing the borders between school and home, learning, loving,

and living. Through his lenses, autobiographical studies are envisioned as windows which permit us to see more clearly, to speak in the "lost language of cranes." Through Pinar's work, the "architecture of the self" constructs humanity, reshaping history and life as the self becomes embodied in the world. This constantly expanding self mirrors the continual transitions of life that seem essential to our considerations of curriculum. Thus envisioned, curriculum is reflective of the provisional and paradoxical nature of our world, questioning our assumptions, increasing our awareness that our understandings of reality are influenced by social, historical, and political constructs. In this curriculum, autobiography creates and recreates the self, embodied in our texts, our flesh, our worlds.

This book provides essential, thought-provoking readings, offering articulate insights for scholars of curriculum theory. Pinar's work affirms that despite the differences in texts and in perceptions of self, our universal must reside in the realm of the human heart and its capacity for feeling.

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