
SEMANTIC PLAY & POSSIBILITY

Editor's Introduction

This section, entitled *Semantic Play and Possibility*, provides a venue for questioning the semantics of educational discourse in light of complex thinking. Semantics, long ago, referred to observing the signs and anticipating the weather. Now days, by definition, semantics is about relationships among words, symbols, and representations. Complex thinking is that which “arises in the realization that certain sorts of self-organizing, self-maintaining phenomena give rise to new rules and transcendent possibilities” (Davis and Phelps, 2005, p. 71). New rules and transcendent possibilities may only become apparent, perhaps, when we begin to play, to place in relation things/concepts that would not ordinarily have that relation; to bump concepts up against observations and experience; to over-leap analytic reason and run wild with ideas. In play, one may, perhaps, be inspired by the fantastic, the chaotic, the impossible. Yet, as complexity science indicates, it is not always chaos that develops, but rather, under particular conditions, what occurs is a phenomenon of emergence that belies analytic logic. What are the implications of complexity science for rethinking the world around us? Will it affect how we see and describe, think or reason? Will our (re)description of events move us and/or others to see differently? To question? To converse about differences?

Each of the authors presented in this issue metaphorically finds an opening to engage with what Davis and Phelps describe in their original introduction to this section as the overly analytic discourse of modern science. For Marg Sellers this opening disrupts the linearity of representation and produces generative rhizomatic ideas about play and creativity. For Lorelei Newton, exploring two research concepts, *validity* and *reflexivity*, in light of experience, produces a space for questioning institutionalized practices.

Marg Sellers, searching the available literature on play, was inspired by Trueit's 2006 article in *Complicity*, “Play which is more than play.” In response, she turned parts of it into a “*poietic*” piece, which she describes as

more adventure than venture as I play with Donna's/my understandings ...disturb[ing]
the distracting linearity of the academic writing and the page. Continuing the play (the
performance, the fun game, the constantly changing movement), I recursively and

speculatively (re)turn to (re)negotiate the (re)reading. Processing through this generative space of possibilities, in the following map I juxtapose my commentary alongside my play-fully poetic version of Trueit's article. This reflects the collaborative and palimpsestic engagement of "produsage"¹ (Bruns, 2005) as I take an opportunity to create a "new remixed version of [her] artistic material," to open through poetry another iteration.

As a registered nurse, Lorelei Newton's clinical practice includes *semantics* in the ancient sense that she reads the signs of situations, and it is her habit as well to observe clinical, measurable signs (objective) and symptoms (subjective), and to understand the significance based not only on clinical evidence, but also on a patient's story and her years of experience. Like Lorenz's reading of weather, she takes into account that small differences—a word, a touch, some sign of relations—can "give rise to new rules and transcendent possibilities." Relations between words ring hollow without human relations. Objective rules of validity, like hospital rules governing patient relations, need to be questioned in light of complex thinking about relations.

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References

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- Davis, B. and Phelps, R. 2005. Semantic play and possibility. Section introduction. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education* 2 (1): 71
- Rorty, R. 1989. *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Trueit, D. 2006. Play which is more than play. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, 3 (1):97-104

¹ In the abstract to his article, Bruns introduces a new word and process: produsage. "Producers engage not in a traditional form of content production, but are instead involved in produsage—the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement. This paper examines the overall characteristics of producers and produsage, and identifies key questions for the produsage model."