
SEMANTIC PLAY & POSSIBILITY

Editor's Introduction

The ironist ... takes the unit of persuasion to be a vocabulary rather than a proposition. Her method is redescription rather than inference. Ironists specialize in redescribing ranges of objects or events in partially neologistic jargon, in the hopes that by the time she is finished using old words in new senses, not to mention introducing brand new words, people will no longer ask questions phrased in the old words.

Richard Rorty (1989, p. 78)

This section, entitled *Semantic Play and Possibility*, provides a venue for questioning the semantics of educational discourse in light of complex thinking. 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, 2005). 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, time and again, it is not 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?

In the following essay Yvette Stogner reevaluates the concept of free time during one particular semester in which she is a teacher (at a junior high school), a student (taking two graduate level courses), a mother (of two babies born in quick succession), and wife. It is obvious, in my mind, she has *no* free time! And yet, as she opens to possibilities inherent in the concept, Yvette begins to view an opportunity ahead of her. Freed from constraints of both habit and legislation, classroom dynamics change as teacher and students relate to each other differently, developing deeper and richer

understandings of poetry and literature, yes, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, understandings of each other, relations, connections to the world around them, and of the bigger questions that often plague seventh grade students. Freed from constraints, as Yvette tells us, it is not necessarily chaos that develops in free time, but rather a whole new sense of organization, one that disrupts traditional notions of what it means to teach and to learn, who can teach, who is a learner, and even where and when learning occurs.

The purpose of this section of *Complicity* is to take up Rorty's challenge; we welcome contributions to the Semantic Play and Possibility section related to the redescription of educational ideas and concepts. Contributors to this section are asked to select a term that is prominent in the educational literature, or perhaps coming to prominence, and to give it a complexivist spin. If you would like to submit an entry, or to suggest an educational thinker and/or educational term that might be included in subsequent issues, please contact the section editor.

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References

- Davis, B. (2005). Editor's introduction, Semantic play and possibility. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*. 2(1)
- Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

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