

# Speaking of Learning...

## Recollections, Revelations, and Realizations

Avraham Cohen, Heesoon Bai, Carl Leggo,  
Marion Porath, Karen Meyer and Anthony Clarke



*SensePublishers*

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## **TO THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUPPORTED OUR LEARNING**

This book is dedicated to my academic colleagues, the staff, and the students at City University of Seattle in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Without their support and encouragement I would not have had the immense opportunity to engage in designing, developing, musing about, and implementing that which humanizes educational environments.

Particular mention goes to Dr. Arden Henley, Principal of Canadian Programs at City University of Seattle in Vancouver, who has an uncanny ability to notice what a person is passionate about and skilful with, and find a way to match that up with what is needed. As well, Colin Sanders, Director of Canadian Counselling Programs, whom I have known for several decades, and who likes to tell the story about how I hired *him* at an early point in both our careers, has provided me great support in my position as coordinator for the full-time Master of Counselling program. Everything I have written about is being enacted in this program.

Finally, a special mention to the students in full-time cohorts 2, 3, 4, and 5 with whom I have worked most closely in the last three and a half years. Their feedback indicates to me that they have learned and enjoyed the experience about as much as I have.

**Avraham Cohen**

To the cosmos that has inspired me to take my learning journey through hard times, good times, interesting times, painful times, and joyful times. To my mother who was a supreme master of survival and resilience, who instilled in me a primordial confidence. To my father who, even though shadowed with his own suffering, unconditionally trusted me to be well and do well. And to my two daughters, Lumina and Serenna, who have been teaching me ever since their birth that learning is all about unlearning, re-learning, and at times forgetting about learning and just playing. And to Avraham, my husband, who seems to have been appointed by my mother, as she was expiring with her last breath, to continue to teach me the most important lessons in life: the courage of unconditional love, humility, and kindness.

**Heesoon Bai**

All my life I have been a learner, a sojourner in the world of words. I am grateful for Kerry and Russell Leggo who often seemed befuddled by their son's passion for books, but bought them anyway and built bookcases to hold them. And I am grateful for Lana Verge who has walked beside me with abiding love for over forty years, patiently convinced that I was responding to an ineffable but evocative call. And I am grateful for Anna Reithmeier and Aaron Leggo who learned about the geography of Canada by driving back and forth across the country with their father behind the steering wheel, occasionally looking back, but mostly staring ahead into the rain, wind, sun, and snow, always hopeful. And I am grateful for Madeleine

and Mirabelle Reithmeier, and Gwenoviere and Alexandria Leggo, who remind their grandfather daily that words cast spells full of the world's wonders.

**Carl Leggo**

To my parents, Jean and Buster Browne, who fanned the flames of learning in a little girl who took everything on with a passion. Their support was both tangible (all those wonderful books!) and intangible. They modelled curiosity, dedication, and strength. My father eschewed his actual first name, John, and was always known by his nickname. From him I learned to be true to myself. I am so grateful to Merv who took over when we married. He is always there—supportive, humorous, and insightful—giving me a safe base from which to continue learning. And to Evan and Finley, grandnephews extraordinaire, thank you for your joyful perspectives on life, love, and learning. You keep the passion alive.

**Marion Porath**

To Sophia  
i missed her  
by a blink, a breath  
the beat of a butterfly wing

her secret bare of flesh and bone  
blew by my window  
her wise old soul looking for home

**Karen Meyer**

To the students like Lara, past, present, and future.

**Anthony Clarke**

## INVOCATION

In *Speaking of Learning* we devote our conversation to “learning” as if it were both the oldest and newest love in our lives—a mature yet wide-eyed love. The six of us are teachers after all; we regard ourselves as veterans in education. Even so, none of us can say in truth we know fully how learning transpires. For what furrowed paths can exist ahead of time? Rather than rummage for answers inside the modern delirium of education that aspires to reduction, we remain (un)bound in pursuit of an infinite and ethical inquiry into learning. In the following chapters we search and research our life stories, linger in the ruptures and conditions of learning.

Our memories and stories tell us that *school* holds a place in our minds, where we learned school culture, conformity and codes according to time, rules and rulers. As school children we belonged to our first formidable learning community where our anxieties about fitting in outran our brief stretch of experience. Nevertheless we survived school. We foraged awkwardly after truth outside school. And we still do. As teachers and researchers, as well as poets, writers, therapists, and artists, our inquiries tell us that learning essentially concerns finding new ways to be and live in the world, beyond what we know. In this book, the six of us embrace a tangible question inside and outside our selves: what else could learning be?



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HONGYU WANG

## FOREWORD

*Understanding others is wise; understanding oneself is  
enlightened. Overcoming others is forceful; overcoming oneself is  
powerful. (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 33)*

I have no doubt that many of you who have the opportunity to read this book will be captivated by it, just as I have been captivated. This book is woven through evocative stories told by masterful educators who came together to explore the meanings of learning, teaching, and life. For those who have read *Speaking of Teaching*, the first book publication of their collaborative work, it is not a surprise to hear, again, the profoundly touching, humane, and imaginative voices of these authors. The two books form a tessellation both within each book and between the two, to borrow Marion Porath's (in this volume) metaphor of tessellations to imagine/image learning. My experience of teaching *Speaking of Teaching* (with amazingly positive, even enlightened responses from students) and reading *Speaking of Learning* also forms a tessellation that resonates with a patterned movement of my own temporal and intercultural learning through encounters.

In the opening chapter, Avraham Cohen points out, "Each of us is a current endpoint of our personal and collective history, which drives our teaching and our learning." To go deeper into this history to uncover and understand their own learning and its implications for their educational work is a shared theme of this book. As educators who teach students to learn about teaching, they take on the courageous task of working through their own most intimate interior world to reach new grounds. Such learning is coupled with unlearning. Heesoon Bai shares her wisdom in this volume, "One cannot be a great educator without being a great learner." It is an important call for all educators to hear, not only in terms of aspiring to learn from students while teaching but also in terms of achieving self-understanding in order to become better pedagogical companions to students. What you will read in this book is these educators' embodied journeys of achieving enlightenment about learning, stories that will move your heart, mind, and spirit, and inspire you to embark your own journey, if you have not yet started.

Learning from the past, we can see that many of us had a serious childhood particularly in school, seriousness that has lingered in photos and been stored in memories, clearly or vaguely. As Doll (2012) points out, "Seriousness quickly overpowers our sense of alternative possibilities; it locks us in to the already tried; it limits our perspective" (p. 148). By contrast, play, rather than serious competition that exists in today's educational world, can release new possibilities, take us on alternative routes, and bring vital life energy to learning. It is unfortunate that learning and play mostly do not go together in institutional forms,

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but playing with ideas, things, and relationships is central to education (Aoki, 2005; Macdonald, 1995). It starts with childhood, as the stories of Shaya and his grandmother in Karen Meyer's (in this volume) novel memoir demonstrate so playfully. Wawa, a name given to grandma by a three-year-old boy, means "play." In play, there is a sense of flow that gives way to the process of complex emergence that embraces rather than rejects ambiguity and uncertainty. What if our schools can become playing fields in which students play, like Shaya, with the watchful, patient and compassionate companionship of teachers?

Carl Leggo (in this volume) speaks about "the etymological tradition where teaching and learning are equated" in Old English, German, and Dutch. Confucius is also well known for, I would add, stating that teaching and learning mutually enhance each other. And I trust that he would applaud these educators' efforts to learn to become sages, to become fully human in an ongoing process of learning, teaching, and educating. At the same time, learning and teaching is not in a relationship of linear causality (Bai, in this volume), as a lot happens in a situation of learning both in and outside of the classroom. Particularly in this age of accountability and standardization in education, to tie teaching and learning in a direct causal-effect way kills the spirit of education in its fundamental task of vitalizing students' inner life and external explorations.

Teaching and learning is also a mutual process across generations—child, parents, and grandparents—as Shaya and Wawa's stories show. If "for the most part, parents lead children. Grandparents follow children" (Meyer, in this volume), then the task of an educator—Anthony Clarke (in this volume) prefers to be an educator rather than a teacher—is to both lead and follow children. Education, in its original sense means "to lead out (*ex-ducere*)" (Aoki, 2005, p. 350). Leading students out to possibilities-yet-to-be, educators must also follow students' pathways in their own timing. What Anthony Clarke learned from Lara is that educators must be attentive to learning from students in following where their potentiality leads. In leading students out, educators both learn and teach.

If wounding has been an almost inevitable by-product of schooling, although the specific patterns and experiences of each individual can be different, as Avraham Cohen argues, then listening to what is unspoken is important if we would like students to heal and become whole again. Learning to listen is not only about listening to words but also listening to the unspoken emotions and feelings. Yet such a capacity for deep listening cannot happen in a teaching situation if a teacher, or a teacher educator, has learned to not get in tune with her or his own emotional world. Without such inner work as authors of this book have accomplished, the depth of pedagogical relationships cannot emerge. If there is an ethic of learning in not doing harm (Bai, in this volume), then there is an ethic of teaching in not doing harm. Great educators are also healers. I advocate a nonviolent relationality in education, beyond the dualism of body and mind that heals the wound and advances organic learning (Wang, 2014). Carl Leggo's question, "When I speak of learning, why does fear taunt and haunt me so?" should ring in our ears every time when we enter each teaching setting—whether at school or university.

## FOREWORD

How this book came to be is as fascinating as the book itself. The authors formed a group eight years ago to discuss what it means to be an educator and what it means to be a learner. As a result, a community of educators as learners has evolved, and *Speaking of Teaching: Inclinations, Inspirations, and Innerworkings* was written and published. From the confluence of “seeming randomness” (Bai) toward the self-organizing interconnections of the group to “great companionship” of these seasoned educators in *feeling* the individual and collective message of learning, and teaching, and being (Cohen), from “a genuine conversation” that is emerging and generating (Clarke) to embracing learning as “the oldest and newest love in our lives” (Meyer), this book has been born out of these educators’ passion for living a worthwhile life together with students. While what they share is much bigger than this book, I suggest that every teacher educator use the book in their teaching one way or another as a springboard to generating insights and wisdom on how to learn, teach, and educate *against* the official and institutionalized learning that is behaviourist, deterministic, narrow-minded, competitive, and permeated by the mechanism of control.

The flow of this book draws me in, touches my heart, and refreshes my mind. The flow disrupts any rigid sense of structure, yet at the same time depends on a certain sense of structure to hold its tension and form a dynamic movement. The juxtaposition of narratives, poetry, photos and artwork, and insights demonstrates vividly this dynamic that cultivates wisdom, nurtures compassion, and inspire enlightenment. This flow is also an exemplar of the group’s innerworking and outerworking in a “micro-version of a stadium wave” as Karen Meyer (in this volume) describes. I hope its flow will have a similar effect on you as you enjoy reading this incredible book. Let their words flow into your world to connect across boundaries and nourish new words to speak of learning, teaching, educating, and becoming...

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