From Rationality To Relationality: Teacher-Student Relationship As Unknowing

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FROM RATIONALITY TO RELATIONALITY:
TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP AS UNKNOWING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The School of Education

by
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To my family, Han Gang, Li Qinghua and Han Shaobo.
Without your love and support, none of this would have been possible.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation reimagines the teacher-student relationship through a philosophical approach that draws on Laozi, Karen Barad, Deleuze & Guattari, and Emmanuel Levinas. The teacher-student relationship is normally considered a relationship of the knower (teacher) and the unknowner (student) based on the modern western tradition of episteme. This dissertation interrogates the modern binary of the teacher/student, subject/object relationship by bringing ontology and ethics into educational discourse. The problematic practices of modern schooling include the reduction of teaching to knowledge transmission, and the rigid dichotomy of a subject/object relation between teacher and student. Following a Taoist Way of philosophical thinking, this work re-imagines the teacher-student relationship by shifting the understanding of “knowing,” “being” and “child” from a modern perspective to an “ethico-onto-epistemological” perspective. Re-thinking the modern concept of knowing into the entanglement of knowing, being, and ethics does not mean we depreciate the value of knowing; rather we adhere to a fundamental break in a privileging of the discursive and a thinking of knowledge as the sole domain of epistemology. Laozi’s philosophy of “wu-wei”, Barad’s concepts of “intra-actions,” “ethico-onto-epistemology,” Deleuze & Guattari’s concepts of “rhizome” and “becoming,” and Levinas’ ethics of the “Other” propose a “pedagogy of unknowing”, where both teachers and students partake in an intra-active process of “becoming.” Based on the pedagogy of unknowing, I argue that it is not knowledge or the knowledge of the Other that is important, rather, our orientation to the Other’s unknowability as a starting point for learning from the Other. Ultimately, in responding to the rational dualism and the crisis of representation in language and theories, the last chapter turns to silence as the end/beginning of the conversation.
CHAPTER ONE
A PLACE CALLED SCHOOL:
THE REASON OF MODERN SCHOOLING AND THE RISK OF EDUCATION

Education always involves a risk. However, the risk is not that teachers might fail because they are not sufficiently qualified. The risk is not that education might fail because it is not sufficiently based on scientific evidence. The risk is not that students might fail because they are not working hard enough or are lacking motivation. The risk is there because, as W. B. Yeats has put it, education is not about filling a bucket but about lighting a fire. The risk is there because education is not an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings. The risk is there because students are not to be seen as objects to be molded and disciplined, but as subjects of action and responsibility.

—Gert Biesta, The Beautiful Risk of Education. (emphasis in original)

There are three major risks in education, as Biesta states in the quote above. First, the risk of education is in privileging scientific methods/reasoning over other ways of knowing. Scientific method and reasoning, which are rooted in the Enlightenment, have dominated in schooling practice since the 16th century. Their direct influence on education as represented in practice are the standardized testing and instrumental pedagogy. Standardized testing, with which we are all familiar, is based on the notion that learning outcomes can be specified into small units and measured in order to evaluate whether the learning outcomes meet the teaching objectives. Instrumental pedagogy is a common practice that advises the teachers to follow a linear ordering of steps to teach knowledge. Both standardized testing and instrumental pedagogy have reduced knowing and experiences into dividable units which can be repeated and measured.

Second, the risk of education exists in this reductive teaching model where teaching is understood as the transmission of knowledge. As Biesta (2014) clearly states in the above quote, “education is not about filling a bucket.” The notion of “filling a bucket” also comes from the tradition of episteme in the Enlightenment, in which teaching was considered instructing and training. This is a deficient model which is predicated upon the assumption that someone knows and someone does not know, and the goal of education is transmitting knowledge from the one
who knows to the one who does not. Also, the notion of “filling a bucket” privileges knowledge as the only goal of education while ignoring the complexity of education, specifically the ontological and ethical dimensions.

Third, the risk of education is also in its rigid dichotomies between subject and object. “Education is commonly understood as an interaction between subjects; an interaction between the educator, who already is a subject, and the child, who has to become a subject by means of the pedagogical activities of the educator” as Biesta (1998, p.1) points out. In other words, the subjectivity of the child is constructed as deficient, lacking, and incomplete. The pedagogical activities are actually instructing and training. In these pedagogical activities, the students are considered the objects, empty buckets to be disciplined and filled up. However, like Biesta, I maintain that education is the encounter of human beings, and students are not to be seen as objects to be molded and disciplined, but as subjects of action and responsibility. Students are, first and foremost, human beings. And the encounter between teachers and students is an ethical interaction. Overall, education is not an interaction between object (student) and subject (teacher) but an encounter between human beings; it is an organic relational system, an entangled teacher-student relationship.

I choose, however, not to start with the risks of education, but, rather, with a brief distinction between education and schooling. If we are going to understand the contemporary risks of education, we need to understand the historical characteristics and assumptions embedded in modern school systems. The modern school is an enterprise that began to take shape in the 18th century, was further developed during the 19th century, and emerged at the end of the 20th century as “a globalized institution” (Tröhler, Popkewitz & Labaree, 2011, p. xi). While education has been informed by and located across historical-cultural contexts, schooling as an institution is a product of the emergence of the modernist paradigm. Dewey asserts, “What
is learned in school is at the best only a small part of education, a relatively superficial part” (1915, p.2). Cutting across the education/schooling binary is a problematic notion which is rooted in English-language and, particularly, North American discussions of education and schooling (Hamilton, 2011). The histories of education are often revealed as mere narratives about the successive institutional form taken by schooling (see Dexter, 1904; Cubberley, 1919). However, one cannot understand education, especially the risk of education as described previously, without an in-depth understanding of modern schooling. As the entry point, I will go back to the Enlightenment to talk about the philosophical underpinnings of modern schooling and to trace the trajectories in the development of the modern school system in the United States from the 18th century to the 20th century.

**The Philosophical Underpinnings of Modern Schooling**

European politics, philosophy, science, and communications were radically reoriented during the course of the “long 18th century” (1685-1815) as part of a movement referred to by its participants as the Age of Reason, or simply the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers in Britain, France, and throughout Europe questioned traditional authority and embraced the notion that humanity could be improved through rational change. The Enlightenment was marked by an emphasis on the scientific method and reductionism, along with an increased questioning of religious orthodoxy. Greatly influenced by the European Enlightenment, along with its own American pragmatism philosophy, the American Enlightenment applied scientific reasoning to politics, science, and religion in the 18th and 19th centuries, which led to the emergence of modern schooling in the 19th century. Earlier philosophers whose work influenced the Enlightenment include Descartes, Bacon, Locke, and Spinoza. The Enlightenment sets up several influential philosophical notions for modern schooling and the later scientific curriculum.
**Reasoning**

Descartes laid the foundation for the 17th-century continental rationalism, later advocated by Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz, and opposed by the empiricist school of thought consisting of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Descartes’s first great contribution was his famous “doubt” as the starting point of all inquiry. Questioning God as the only external authority and force, Descartes turned to “thinking” as the only way of proving the existence of human beings. As Descartes (1983) states in *The Principles of Philosophy*:

> “We have been told that there is an omnipotent God who created us. Now we do not know whether he may have wished to make us beings of the sort who are always deceived even in those matters which seem to us supremely evident … We may, of course, suppose that our existence derives not from a supremely powerful God but either from ourselves or from some other source; but in that case, the less powerful we make the author of our coming into being, the more likely it will be that we are so imperfect as to be deceived all the time.” (p. 5)

He contended that an equally powerful doubt may be generated on the opposite supposition—namely, the supposition that “I” am not the creature of an all-powerful being. Descartes’ notion of reasoning came to be understood in terms of logical procedures rather than imaginative engagements with the cosmos. Descartes (1664/1985) categorically separated mind from body in a manner that placed each in a dichotomous relationship. Specifically, he considered the human body as a machine and the mind as the immaterial substance that moves the machine. As he says in his famous quote, “I think therefore I am;” the body—“I”—only exists because of the mind.

Like Descartes, Bacon's method emphasized the importance of taking nothing for granted from past knowledge. However, he turned to experimentation rather than abstract reasoning, which began with the patient observation of nature to construct a hypothesis that is testable. Bacon (1862/1620) suggests that knowledge is “like some magnificent structure without any foundation” (p.18). Consequently, science should “proceed by searching for patterns amid
facts gathered through repeated testing” (Davis, 2014, p. 68). Bacon’s thoughts engaged in a dramatic shift from deductive reasoning to inductive reasoning. Bacon’s major contribution was to “prompt scientific research to move beyond the inherited and prevailing emphases on description and classification into the realms of theorizing, hypothesis testing, and creative exploration” (p.68). Furthermore, in setting out the structure of inductive reasoning, Bacon relied on the concept of “measurability” in order to verify the truth through demonstration. From doubting the existence of God to the isolation of knowing (episteme) from being (gnosis), the rise of rationalism and empiricism together shifted the God-centered universe to a human-centered universe.

Holding the same empirical approach as Bacon, John Locke (1689) postulated that the mind was “a blank slate or tabula rasa” at birth. Locke studied how the mind behaves instead of theorizing about the nature of it. He believed that we are born without innate ideas and knowledge is determined by experience derived from sensual perception. Locke’s theory of the mind influenced later philosophers, including David Hume and Immanuel Kant, in the concepts of “self” and “the will of freedom” in knowing the world. The belief that human beings have the capacity to possess knowledge through reasoning initiated the origins of humanism, which refers to any system of thought that places human beings as the center of discussion, rather than God or nature. It includes theories of radical individualism and rational judgment that privilege a prior knowledge as clear and true (Kant, 1960). What makes reasoning, the mind, and individualism possible then? It is the separation of mind and body, as Descartes would argue, resulting in Cartesian dualism.

Knowledge/Truth

Reasoning leads to truth, or reasoning is the only way for us to reach the truth, according to Descartes. He argues that episteme—which focuses on knowing—should be completely
separate from gnosis, which explores the meaning of existence. Taking up Platonic metaphysical assumptions, Descartes believed that truth exists in an ideal realm, and one can only gain access to it through careful deductive reasoning. Deeply rooted in his study of mathematics, Descartes asserted that whether it is transparent truth or demonstrable truth, once it is discovered and approved, it is fixed. For example, as he discusses transparent truth:

> [A]rithmetic, geometry and other subjects of this kind, which deal only with the simplest and most general things, regardless of whether they exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides. It seems impossible that such transparent truths should incur any suspicion of being false. (Descartes, 1641/1911, p.1)

Such undeniable knowledge is the truth, according to Descartes. Truth is a consequence of knowledge rather than its precondition. In seeking knowledge/truth from the external world, Descartes questioned the absolute authority of God and affirmed an independent existence based on thinking.

**(Cartesian) Dualism**

Dualism is inescapable in the discussion of truth and reason as aforementioned. Dualism maintains a rigid distinction between the mind and body as well as a distinction between mind and matter. The mind, which relates to consciousness, spirit, or soul, continually manifests itself through the brain, while the body or material is to be observed without consciousness. As Descartes (1985/1649) describes,

> [The] mechanism of our body is so constructed that simply by this gland's being moved in any way by the soul or by any other cause, it drives the surrounding spirits towards the pores of the brain, which direct them through the nerves to the muscles; and in this way the gland makes the spirits move the limbs. (p.231)
One foundational influence of dualism in education is the dichotomy of subject and object. The subject is considered a thinking thing with active consciousness, and the object is a passive receiver of information, thus does not think. Specifically, the subject is a being who has a unique consciousness, or an entity that has a relationship with another entity, which exists of itself—the object. By lacking consciousness, the objects usually do not have real or full existence or value and need to be managed and disciplined by the subjects. In schools, it is the teacher who is considered the subject, and the students the objects—more specifically, empty buckets. As a consequence, the subject is the center, having priority over all other beings.

**Method**

The way to “know” has a long history which can be traced back to Ancient Greek or Asian periods; however, “method,” as a terminology indicating the specified procedure in approaching something with a definite plan, began with Descartes. In *Discourse on Method (1637)*, Descartes explains how we should conduct research from doubting and reach the truth by researching step by step, which he refers to as “method.” The progress and certainty of mathematical knowledge, Descartes supposes, provides an emulable model for a similarly productive philosophical method, characterized by four simple rules¹. Later, Bacon contributed conductive reasoning as the other way of reaching the truth. Locke (1693) also discussed that science must be capable of being tested and repeated, and that nothing is exempt from being disproven. Subsequently, scientific method based on testing and measurement became the central constructs of positivism; and method as a particular procedure in research played a central role in scientific inquiry,

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¹ Descartes’ method is characterized by four steps: 1) Accept as true only what is indubitable; 2) Divide every question into manageable parts; 3) Begin with the simplest issues and ascend to the more complex; 4) Review frequently enough to retain the whole argument at once.
especially quantitative research and conservative qualitative research. The ultimate aim of method is “to reach certainty” (Descartes, 1637, p.3).

Overall, the Enlightenment had a profound influence on the American industrial revolution and the development of modern schooling. American industrialization shaped the values and philosophy of education and schooling in the 19th century. As Dewey asserts, “One can hardly believe there has been a revolution in all history so rapid, so extensive, so complete …[it] overshadows and even controls all others …[it is] writ so large that he who runs may read” (1915/1956, pp.8-9). The revolution Dewey refers to is industrialization, which led America from a second-level agricultural power to a first-level industrial one during the late 18th and the 19th century. As Doll (1993) notes, “This revolution has been a dominant force in twentieth-century society, shaping our values, including the way we envision education and schooling, and giving our society its particular technological cast” (p.45). The next section will take a look at the influence of these concepts – reasoning, knowledge/truth, dualism, and method – on modern school practices.

**Contextualizing Modern Schooling**

Because the literature on the history of education in the 18th century and the modern curriculum during the late 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries is vast, I make no attempt in this section to write a comprehensive historical literature review on these subjects. Rather, this section provides a review of some key elements of modern schooling, especially those still dominant in the current schooling practice.

**School**

As I have discussed in the last section, reasoning, knowledge/truth, dualism, and method provided the sufficient conditions for the emergence of the reductionist form of education. The term “school” emerged at the beginning of the 17th century in England and marked what would
become mass education (Davis, 2004). Mathematics, reading, and writing were the disciplines students were required to master. The role of the teacher was in helping learners construct a coherent world which began with basic, elementary competencies and moved to more logically combined and sophisticated concepts through years of schooling. At the heart of schooling was “method.” Ong (1958/1983) maintains that the 16th century had no word in ordinary usage that clearly expressed what we mean today by method—“a series of ordered steps gone through to produce with certain efficacy a desired effect, —a routine of efficiency” (p. 225). While the concept of order was not absent in medieval thinking, it tended to focus on the order of the mind or discourse (rhetoric)—in other words, a routine of thinking. The shift from rhetoric to a method of logic is often associated with one particular individual: Peter Ramus (1515-1572). For Ramus, “method” (methodus) is the “orderly pedagogical presentation of any subject by reputedly scientific descent from ‘general principles’ to ‘specials’ by means of definition and bipartite division” (Ong, 1958/1983, p. 30).

Curriculum, especially the scientific curriculum, is another core element of modern schooling. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest source for “curriculum” is the University of Glasgow in 1633, with the exception of the 1582 records from the University of Leiden, where a version of Peter Ramus's Professio Regia with the term “curriculum” appears. Curriculum, as used by Ramus, considers the learning process through linear, dividable units, which can be measured by the predetermined criteria charting knowledge as stable, fixed, repetitive facts. According to Doll (cited in Trueit, 2012), “Teaching now moved from laying out issues for discussion to disseminating knowledge for absorption” (pp. 92-94).

Teaching and Learning

Both the early forms of curriculum and the later scientific curriculum that emerged in the 19th century suggest the need for control through teaching and learning. The scientific
curriculum, typically represented in the Tyler rationale, structure teaching and learning as follows: begin with the predetermined objectives, select and organize experiences to reflect the objectives, determine whether the objectives have been attained through the measurement of learning outcomes.

The Tyler rationale found its expression in school curricula through the behavioral objective movement of the 1960s (e.g., Bloom, 1956. Taxonomy of Educational Objectives), the competency movement of the 1970s, and the Hunter model of the 1980s. What existed in all these patterns, as Doll (1993) asserts, were the “pre-set goals, selections and direction of experiences, evaluation” (p.54). He continues, “Along with the linear ordering of this sequence and its dichotomous separation of ends from means there exists an instrumentalist or functionalist view of the nature of education” (p.54). Teaching, in this sense, is about filling the bucket through knowledge transmission. As a result, the teachers who already know are the subjects, while the students are the objects waiting to be filled with knowledge. In this reductive institutional process, education is reduced to transmitting, and the teacher-student relationship is reduced to subject-object relationship. Both teachers and students, as individuals, have been totalized to sameness through the acquisition of knowledge. Levinas (1996) writes:

Knowledge is a relation of the Same with the Other in which the Other is reduced to the Same and divested to its strangeness, in which thinking relates itself to the other, but the other is no longer other as such; the other is already appropriated, already mine. Henceforth, knowledge is without secrets or open to investigation, that is to say, it is a world. It is immanence. (p.151)

What is hidden within language is how control and discipline have been practiced through knowledge acquisition.
The Education Dichotomy as Subject and Object

Under the instrumental view of education, the student was treated as the object in two different ways. Firstly, during the period when science and scientific curriculum dominated school practice, education focused more on disciplines than students. Students were the receivers of knowledge, like empty buckets. In this sense, the student was apparently the object. Secondly, with the emergence of cognitive psychology and pragmatism in education, the focus of pedagogy shifted from teachers, subjects, curricula, and schools to students. “Learner” rapidly became the new name for students, while the teacher was considered the facilitator of learning. This late 19th-century invention of the pedagogical category of learner reconstructed the child as an object of the teacher’s scrutiny. As Popkewitz (2001) argues, “to make children ‘learners’ is to introduce a modern conception of childhood” (p.155). The modern concept of childhood is based on a linear order of development. In order to call someone ‘learner,’ there must be something for this person to learn. This “something” could be anything as long as it can be learned. What matters in calling someone a learner is not what needs to be learned, “what matters is the fact that the learner is constructed in terms of a lack” (Biesta, 2010, p.541. emphasize in original). “Lack” means incomplete, not yet knowledgeable, not yet skillful, not yet developed, and so on. “To call someone a learner thus suggests an inequality between those who have learned and now know, can, or are, and those who still need to learn in order to know, be able, or be” (Biesta, 2010, p.541). At this point, the student is the object who needs to become a subject by means of pedagogical activities in education. In brief, students are considered the objects of learning in the modern schooling system; they either need to be passively filled with knowledge, or they have to become the new subject through educational activities. In the discourse of modern schooling, the student always lacks knowledge, is incomplete, while the teacher who has already learned, and has the capacity of learning, is the knower.
The Cartesian dichotomy of subject and object, which grounds subjectivity in epistemology, makes possible the distinction between the knower and the known. However, shaped by the dichotomy of subject and object in schools, the modern child has become someone no longer related to conceptions of time and space bounded in one’s community. The reductive model of learning has shaped the child into someone who lacks knowledge and personal ways of thinking. The attentiveness given by the teacher is thought to be measurable in secular, scientific ways. Hence, the modern child is seen as a rational, “problem-solving” and “developing” person through learning.

I have discussed the main problems of modern schooling from three aspects: the privilege of science in modern schooling, the reduction of teaching to knowledge transmission, and the dichotomy of subject/object between teachers and students. Transmission frames our teaching-learning process. We define good teaching (which results in good learning) as the transfer of knowledge—often in the form of noble works and accepted procedures of the western modern tradition. Several concepts rooted in modernism that I have critically examined include “knowledge,” “reasoning,” “scientific management,” “measurability,” “instructing,” “training,” and “learner.” One common issue that I identified from these modernist concepts is the loss of humanity or reduction of humans to data. Schools have been constructed with isolated elements: curricula (categorized in different subjects), educational objectives, scientific method, and standardized measurement. However, education is “not an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings” (Biesta, 2010, p.1). This notion urges us to re-imagine the teacher-student relationship from more than an epistemological perspective.

Reconceptualizing Knowing in Being

Underneath the issues of modern schooling that I examined above is a philosophy of individualism and knowlegism within a closed system. Postmodern educational scholars,
including (but not limited to) Jean-François Lyotard (1984), William Pinar (1998, 2015),
Max van Manen (1982, 1990) draw our attention to a fundamental contrast between open and
closed systems. The closed systematic view during the 18th and 19th centuries looks at the world
with concepts such as truth, cause and effect, certainty, prediction, knowledge, and control,
while the post-modern view that emerged during the 20th century envisions an open system that
looks at the world with concepts including open-endedness, uncertainty, transformative, process,
equilibration, disequilibrium, interaction, and chaos. One major shift from modernism to
postmodernism is a shift from rationalism to relations. While rationalism is fascinated with
certainty and truth, the concept of relations from an open systematic point of view might provide
some possibilities in disrupting method and truth, thus reconceptualizing knowing. In this
section, I will first introduce some philosophers who challenge the rationalist worldview from a
relational perspective, including Laozi, Karen Barad, Deleuze & Guattari, and Emmanuel
Levinas. Relations, for them, are transformative and ethical. Relations are not constructed
through human activities, but through the way humans and the world exist. In other words,
relations are the way of being.

Revisiting Relations

The concept of relations has been widely discussed in education from different
philosophical and cultural traditions. In the eastern tradition, exploring the inner relationship
between mind and body, as well as the human relationship with the universe, are the two most
important themes in Chinese cultural history from Taoism and Confucianism from the pre-Qin
period\(^2\) to neo-Confucianism in the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties.

\(^2\) The pre-Qin period refers to the long period before emperor Qinshihuang's unification
of ancient China. It refers to the time period before BC 221.
Regarding the relationship of body and mind, most Chinese philosophers believe in the notion of “primitive Body-Mind in One,” and most of the later philosophical and cultural studies are based on this theory. I do not intend to provide a history of Chinese culture to trace the origins and development of the “primitive Body-Mind in One.” However, I provide a glimpse of this tradition with Chinese hieroglyphic characters and the meanings they carried. For example, the traditional Chinese word for listening is written as “聆,” which is a combination of a few symbols. The “耳” on the left is the “ear,” while “王” represents a standing person. On the right side of the character, the top is a simplified symbol of “徳,” which means “virtue,” and the bottom, “心,” means the “heart.” Hence, listening, in Chinese culture, is traditionally a virtue of the human. In order to listen, one needs to use the ear and the heart. The heart as an organ may not have the function of hearing based on scientific research. However, it is related to spiritual experiences such as caring, respecting, and loving in Chinese culture. The harmony between humans and nature is another foundational relationship that was widely explored through religions (Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism), spiritual experiences (Zen Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Meditation, etc.), philosophical/cultural studies and everyday life (Taoism, Confucianism, and neo-Confucianism). In Chinese culture, the self was rarely discussed logically as an individual existence like in western rationalism. The self is always already related with others in various forms. “The harmony of human and nature” (“天人合一”) is one core idea in

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3 The word “nature” usually means the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations in the western world. However, nature, as used in this dissertation, carries a broader meaning based on Chinese Taoism. The meaning of Nature (written as “自然” in Chinese, pronounced as “zi ran”) is revealed in the characters of “zi” and “ran” separately and “ziran” as one word. “Zi” (自), as a character, not only refers to the self but also indicates the consequence of being self—freedom and joy; “ran” (然) means “as it is,” “as itself reveals.” For Laozi, “ziran” as one word refers to the Way of Being—being oneself as it is and being in a harmonious relationship with the nature.
Taoism and Confucianism. The philosophy of "you" and "wu" represents the foundational understanding of relationship in Chinese culture. This dialectical thinking can be found in several schools of thought in ancient and modern China. For example, it can be found in the *Dao De Jing*’s concepts of the relationship of presence and absence ("you" and "wu"), action and non-action (wu-wei), slow and fast, full and hollow, and so on.

In the western tradition, relationships were reduced to dualism and individualism during the Enlightenment and industrialization. As a consequence, “current understandings of research based in dualistic, binary assumptions must be disrupted as a means to break the barries that divide and separate in order to create spaces for dialogue” (Hendry, 2010, p.79). Well aware of western individualism and the eastern side of the rim, Aoki quotes Roshin, a Daoist teacher, to make his point on relationality. He explains that humanity’s greatest delusion is that I am here and you are there. “There is no American-style narcissism here,” as Pinar (2005) comments, “in which the ‘other’ disappears into my ‘self.’” (p. 79. emphasis in the original). Instead, the self and other are clearly distinguished. In the 20th century, with the development of continental philosophy and its influence on education, philosophers including Heidegger and Levinas, as well as curriculum scholars like John Dewey (1997), Jane Addams (2009), Nel Noddings (2004), Maxine Green (1995), Ted Aoki (1986, 1990), William Pinar (1995,2010), and William Doll, Jr. (1993), to name a few, have sought to reconsider the concept of the self-other relationship and to revalue its meaning in education. The main ideas these philosophers and curriculum theorists

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4 Next to the Bible, the *Dao De Jing* is the most translated work in world literature today. However, it is hard to follow the standard citation format to cite *Dao De Jing* due to its numerous different editions, which were translated either from traditional Chinese to simplified Chinese, or from Chinese to English (and several other languages). Also, many of the translations, based on my study, are more accurate in their literal meaning than their philosophical meaning. In addition, because each verse/chapter of *Dao De Jing* is very short, citing the chapter number makes it much easier for the reader to locate the original text. Based on aforementioned reasons, I will put *Dao De Jing* and the chapter number (e.g., *Dao De Jing*, ch.1) if it is my own translation; otherwise, I will list the translator’s name along with the verse number if I cited the full text of the translation (e.g. *Dao De Jing*, ch.1, XXX, trans, year-if applicable).

--author's note
bring to our attention is that relations are not constructed through human activities, but already exist in the world. To borrow from Bingham and Sidorkin’s (2004) book title, No Education without Relation is the core idea guiding me through the study of the teacher-student relationship. In Democracy and Education (1997), Dewey famously writes that “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (p. 93).

In the language of this study, the researcher is trying to move away from the identity-centered “East” and “West” into the space between east and west, or among the space of east, west, south, and north with lower case “e,” “w,” “s,” and “n.” By focusing on the thoughts between west and east, such “and,” as Aoki interpreted (1996), is “both ‘and’ and not-and.” Both “and/not-and” space, as Aoki explains, is a space “of conjoining and disrupting, indeed, a generative space of possibilities, a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity newness emerges” (p. 318). As shown in figure 1, which is a traditional Chinese ink painting of the symbol of Yin and Yang, there is no boundary between the forces of Yin and Yang. The traditional Chinese ink painting has its unique positions in art history. It is an art of expression rather than a representation or reproduction. Expression manifests the presence of being. The presence of being, the signifier, is the major difference between the spirit of the traditional Chinese ink painting and the realistic painting that emphasizes the signified. The signified is what exists on the canvas, while the signifier, the expression, depends on the interactions between what existed and what was not said. The signifier enables the audiences’ participation and imagination in approaching the poetic meaning beyond that which exists physically. Such expression does not emphasize the specific skills and techniques of painting, but the charm of the painting spirit. The art of expression, or the philosophy of saying, is also how I rethink the teacher-student
relationship through the four pairs of relationships. In the next section, I will introduce the main philosophers and concepts I draw on in this dissertation.

Figure 1. Relationality/Dao

**Laozi and a Transformative Philosophy of “Wu-Wei”**

The teacher-student relationship is a humane relationship that always reaches beyond human beings; it is a relationship within nature, of which the human being is part. My profound belief in this idea stems from my Chinese origins and the fundamental spirit of Taoism, which
unites humanity and nature as one and emerged during the 4th century BCE. Laozi is one of the earliest and most important thinkers in Taoism and conceives of human beings and the universe as naturally being together as a whole. From a Daoist point of view, matter and energy are interchangeable; therefore, in order to be content as a human being, one must accept change as it continually happens and realize that all humans, matter, animals, and the universe are unified in the Dao.

The Dao (道), sometimes translated as the “Way”, literally means the pathway. This way does not exist in reality; it is a metaphor which reveals the movement of Being in the universe. However, the Way cannot be named or spoken in language. As Laozi asserts, “Ways which can be spoken of are not the eternal way. Names which can be spoken are not eternal names” (Ch.1, DaoDeJing). The Way here is nothingness, as in the philosophy of “wu wei.” Everything comes from nothingness; nothingness is the openness of possibilities, according to Laozi.

Transformative relationships are another important concept in understanding the philosophy of wu wei. Laozi conceived of the human and the universe as a dynamic system—the One (Yi —)—which is ethical and ontological. Appreciating the harmony of humanity and nature without emphasizing humans as the center could help us to rethink the modernized western concept of the “self” from a non-individualistic view. Actually, although Laozi often uses two things or two sides to describe how things change from one way to another, the two sides he describes is not the same as dualism in the western tradition. The Way that Yin and Yang forces interact with each other can be easily found in everyday practice; it is the basic principle of the universe. Yin and Yang is not a relationship of “both…and” with two sides joined together. Rather, Yin is in Yang, and Yang is entangled with Yin—where each may give rise to the other. In order to show this dynamic, transformative relationship in wu wei, I added a
dash between wu and wei (now written as “wu-wei”) as an indication of this harmonious relationship.

Karen Barad and Agential Realism

When I was trying to find a different word than “interactions” to describe the ongoing movement between the forces of Yin and Yang, Karen Barad's “intra-actions” caught my attention. Karan Barad is an American scholar in the philosophy of science and feminism, known particularly for her theory of agential realism. She is usually categorized as a scholar in New Materialism. New Materialism, in general, opposes the humanist (dualist) and transcendental traditions; instead, it shifts the humanist structure by allowing for travel through fluxes. New Materialism shows “how the mind is always material (the mind is an idea of the body), how matter is necessarily something of the mind (the mind has the body as its object), and how nature and culture are always already ‘naturecultures’ (Donna Haraway’s term)” (Barad, 2012a, p.48).

In her book Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (2007), Barad replaces “interactions”—which is what happens between individuals that existed prior to an exchange—with “intra-actions” in her framework of agential realism. Interaction is a kind of action that occurs as two or more objects have an effect upon one another. The two-way effect happens between two already existing objects. Intra-action, however, denies the preexistence of individuals before the changes. Instead, it reveals that the agencies emerge through the changes in unpredictable directions. Intra-action, as a key element of agential realism, “signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies” (Barad, 2007, p.33. italics in original). Barad also states that

“[D]istinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the ‘distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements” (p.33. italics in original).
According to Barad’s agential realist ontology, individuals do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action. Here, similar to the self in Taoism, Barad asserts that “individuals” do not preexist, nor do they exist independently; they only exist within relations, within phenomena, within the “ongoing reconfigurings of the world” (p.141).

Based on Barad's agential realist account, “matter,” is not mere stuff, but “an inanimate given-ness” (Kleinmam, 2012, p.80). Through a close study of Niels Bohr’s research on quantum physics, Barad points out that matter is not a passive object but involves performative discursive practices. Unlike the common-sense view of representation serving as a mediator between the knower and known, a performative understanding of discursive practices insists that our thinking, observing, and theorizing are “entangled with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being” (p.133). Matter is not passive, immutable, or mute; it is doing. Hence, matter is mattering. Mattering is the ongoing intra-active differentiating of the world. It engages in the intra-actions. From this perspective, Barad's concept of agential realism is an entanglement of what is usually taken to be separate in rationalism and humanism—ethics, ontology, and epistemology. Barad's intra-active view of the world resonates with Laozi's harmony of humanity and nature. The universe runs in a transformative relationship between humanity and nature.

Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari’s Rhizome

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) challenge the dichotomy of subject and object, as well as the notion of progress (linear or genealogical) in their concepts of “rhizome,” “assemblage,” and “becoming.” They use “rhizome” to disrupt the linear progress and the genealogical tree model, which are both rooted in western thinking. As a critique of the linear progress in modern schooling and its desire for efficiency and classification, a genealogical view of education used to be considered by educational scholars as a better way of understanding educational relations.
Genealogy is “a critical interpretive practice that aims to discern the ways in which discourses constitute the objects, practices, and/or subjects (subjectivities) that are available for study” (Davis, 1997, p.206). However, both the linear model and the genealogical tree assign certain foundations as the starting point, and both follow certain directions regarding how development is understood. “It is odd how the tree has dominated western reality and all of the western thought,” as Deleuze and Guattari critique, “from botany to biology and anatomy, but also gnosiology, theology, ontology, all of the philosophy … the root-foundation, Grund, racine, fondement” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 18). We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. A rhizomatic way of thinking might be another option, as Deleuze and Guattari argue. A rhizome is an “antigenealogy” (p.21); it is made of plateaus, and “a plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end” (p.21). A rhizome is an “acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by a circulation of states” (p.21).

The rhizomatic way of thinking interrogates the “modern” child in its “becoming,” which is another important concept I utilize in rethinking the teacher-student relationship. Becoming, as we normally understand, is from one point to another point through a line. A point is always either a point of origin or a point of destination. Such understanding of becoming is a consequence of linear time as people usually use it in life. However, drawing on Bergson’s (1913) duration of time, Deleuze & Guattari re-conceptualize becoming as a process of deterritorialization. The clock time (precisely defined by similar units), as the repetition of one moment after another, structures life and experiences in a way that makes newness and the unexpected extraordinarily limited. However, the duration, according to Bergson, is the quality of time lived. It cannot be measured or broken into smaller units without being fundamentally changed. Bergson (1965) reminds us of the importance of consulting duration rather than the
clock because “this duration which science eliminates, and which is so difficult to conceive and express, is what one feels and lives” (p.13). Drawing on time as experienced and lived, Deleuze and Guattari question the definition of “childhood,” which is based on a linear timeline, and create the concept of “becoming-child.” The “becoming” in becoming-child is “a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree” (1987, p.239). From this rhizomatic perspective, the “becoming-child” occurs through blocks instead of lines, providing a more organic notion of the child. Becoming-child would be very helpful for educational scholars to rethink who the students are in the classroom and how they relate to the teachers.

**Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethics of Otherness**

Laozi, Barad, Deleuze & Guattari all tackle the problems of relationship in humanism based on different contexts and expand the humanist relationship to an ethico-onto-epistemological perspective, but none of them specifically address ethics in depth and length. Levinas fundamentally discussed the philosophy of ethics, which added one important lens for me to look through at the teacher-student relationship. Some of his most important works on ethics that I draw on in this study include *Totality and Infinity* (1961/1969), *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974/1981), *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-other* (1991/1998), and *Humanism of the Other* (1972/2003).

Levinas’ concept of the “Other” challenges the Cartesian ego and the self as well as the Heideggerian notion of ontological being with ethics. For Levinas (1961/1969), the “Other” is irreducible to comprehension; it is an ethical engagement with respect for the “alterity” of the Other. During the interaction with the Other, one is not reflecting upon the other but is actively engaged in a noncomprehensive, nonsubsumptive relation to alterity; the focus is brought to the particular individual in front of oneself, forgoing the mediation of the universal. The problem with the dichotomy of subject and object is its isolation of the subject from the external world.
As Heidegger (1925/1992) states, the subject is “being-in-the-world.” “Being-in” does not mean the subject just exists on the earth, but is “dwelling,” “being present to” the world. However, an ontology of being has its problems too. The problem with ontology, according to Levinas, is that it can only think of the individual as a particular instance of something more general. But precisely in doing do, the subject’s uniqueness is obliterated (See Levinas, 1998, pp. 190-196). The reason we need to go beyond essence is because, as Levinas (1969) says,

“The who involved in activity is not expressed in the activity, is not present, does not attend his own manifestation, but is simply signified in it by a sign in a system of signs, that is, as a being who is manifested precisely as absent from his manifestation: a manifestation in the absence of being—phenomenon” (p.178).

Levinas’ concept of “Other” reveals the alterity of the individual subject in an ethical relationship, which provides us with a different way of looking at the teacher-student relationship than the current practice of totalizing students as the same through knowledge and standardized tests.

Why Them?

This dissertation is a conversation about the teacher-student relationship. And I hope it would be an authentic conversation. According to Aoki (1981), an authentic conversation is an open conversation. Never empty or exclusive, it is a plenitude of openness. Invoking one of his favorite metaphors, he tells us: “I understand conversation as a bridge of two worlds by a bridge, which is not a bridge.” Such a bridge connects different thoughts and is not aiming to send you to the other side or hold you here, but in the conjunctive spaces in-between. Each thought contributes to the plenitude of the conversation, none of which is better than the other, but in the openness intra-act with one another. Embracing the open conversations among different philosophers in inspiring us to think about the teacher-student relationship and its becoming is
one important reason that I bring Laozi, Barad, Deleuze and Guattari, and Levinas to the dialogue. I pay homage to Levinas for his attitude in encountering different thoughts. According to Levinas,

Enacting a kind of conversation that does not say ‘no’ and does not so vigorously try to appropriate the text allows for a different kind of encounter. We may find in this kind of encounter, in the encounter that involves homage and conversation, not critique and tyranny, but work that acknowledges the impossibility of statement. It does not say, ‘We know, and this is why.’ Instead, it says, ‘Here is a conversation that tends toward a purpose.’ This conversation is not something that we can recall in reflection, though. We must participate in a conversation, enact a meeting, approach, encounter. (Allen, 2008, pp.897-8)

Participating in a conversation means not knowing what ideas/thoughts are going to be discussed during the conversation. It is through the participation of each scholar, or different thoughts, that different ideas emerge through enacting. This process is how the four philosophers I draw on in this dissertation intertwined with my thinking. It is the “saying” when I encounter with them that enables the possibilities in reimagining the teacher-student relationship.

In addition, they enrich the conversation on the teacher-student relationship in various ways. Laozi's philosophy of wu-wei sets the tone so that the relationship discussed in this dissertation is beyond a humanist relationship; it focuses on the interactions of human beings, as well as human beings and the environment they are living in. Barad’s concept of “intra-actions” is helpful in clarifying the normal misinterpretations of Yin and Yang as dualistic. According to her, the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming. Deleuze & Guattari, with many ideas related to Chinese cultures (e.g., plateau, becoming), inspire us by disrupting the linear concept of time and the linear cognitive way of thinking by categorizing the child and childhood. Lastly, although the relationship of humanity and the world as Laozi, Barad, Deleuze and Guattari write about is an ethical relationship, it is Levinas’ work on the ethics of the Other that impacted my understanding of unknowing the most.
In this dissertation, I did not plan to introduce each of the four philosophers I draw on at length, but rather I focus on the relationality of their ideas. And my main focus is to explore different possibilities in understanding education relationships. Further, this study may generate more questions instead of providing solid answers. I hope that the ideas and concepts discussed/lived here will elicit more pondering and point to areas of future research.

**Research Questions**

As the aforementioned ontological and ethical junctures begin to outline, teaching and learning are complicated intra-active events bound to the teacher-student relationship. This philosophical study aims to implicate the ethics of educational practice embodied through teaching and learning, as well as the teacher-student relationship. More specifically, I engage with the following research questions in order to open up spaces for new ways of thinking and understanding educational practices.

1. How has the “teacher-student relationship” been understood in modern western intellectual traditions as well as in modern schooling?

2. In what ways could an “ethico-onto-epistemological” approach challenge the modern understanding of the teacher-student relationship?

3. Informed by a philosophy of unknowing, how might education be reimagined?

**Chapter Preview**

Guided by the research questions listed above, this dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter One is a historical review of the development of modern schooling revealing the philosophical underpinnings of modern education. The major problems of modern schooling are as follows (but are not limited to): the privileging of scientific reasoning, the reduction of teaching to knowledge transmission, and the rigid dichotomy of framing the teacher-student relationship as a subject-object relation.
Chapter Two ponders on uncertainties through a Daoist “Way” of philosophical thinking. Method, as I take on in this study, is a currere (Pinar, 1975), a process (Whitehead, 1929/1978); it is a Daoist Way of inquiry that cannot be designed or specified. In specific, this study utilizes philosophical thinking as method by drawing on Deleuze’s “concept,” Derrida’s “differance,” and Laozi’s “Way.” Philosophical thinking as method, in alignment with “thinking with concept” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), (re)Thinking as (non) Method (Robinson-Morris, 2019), “method assemblage” (Law, 2004), and “methodologies without methodology” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), initiates “new lines of flight” in qualitative research. Philosophical thinking and rethinking “raise[s] more questions rather than producing solutions, produces more lines of flight; it is provocation of thought” (Robinson-Morris, 2019, p.85). It does not only provide me the concepts for understanding the current teaching and learning practice—which shaped the teacher-student relationship—but also provides a critical lens to think about how different teacher-student relationships were made and how we might create different teacher-student relationships.

Chapter Three opens a new plenitude of possibilities in reimagining the teacher-student relationship from an ethico-onto-epistemological perspective. An ethico-onto-epistemological perspective brings knowing into being and ethics. Based on the examination of “knowing,” “being,” and “child” from both the epistemological perspective and the ethical perspective, I argue that re-thinking the modern concept of knowing into the entanglement of knowing, being, and ethics does not mean we depreciate the value of knowing. Rather, it means that we adhere to a fundamental break in the privileging of knowledge as the sole domain of epistemology. The main concepts I draw on in this chapter include Levinas’ philosophy of the “Other,” a Daoist transformative interpretation of being (the “Way”), and Deleuze & Guattari’s concept of “rhizome” and “becoming.” The teacher-student relationship, in this sense, should not be
reduced to the subject-object relationship, but ought to be understood as an intra-active process of “becoming.” Therefore, knowing is not only about knowledge but about ethics.

Ethical knowing is unknowing. The western obsession of knowing without often listening to the Other prevents the possibilities opened by unknowing. In Chapter Four, moving away from the notion that the whole world is epistemologically available, I turn to Laozi's philosophy of “wu-wei”, particularly the concepts of “nothingness” and “naturalness,” to explore the meaning of unknowing and its relation to educational practice. While knowledge is what is already said, the wisdom of unknowing, as revealed through “nothingness” and “naturalness,” is the not-yet-said, the openness of the possibilities which cannot be represented and predicted; it is ethics. Based on this notion, I propose a “pedagogy of unknowing.” Informed by the philosophy of unknowing, two possible ways in reimagining teaching and the teacher-student relationship were discussed in this chapter: a) Teaching based upon the ethics of the Other would not focus on acquiring knowledge about ethics or the Other, but would instead have to consider interactions based on caring and responsibilities as the practice of Otherness. In this sense, the way in which we engage the Other becomes a central question of ethics and for education; and b) prioritizing the ethical relation over knowing would mean that teaching is not done to control the student, but to affirm her/his unknowable alterity in a being-with relationship. Such being-with relationship is not a humanist relationship but welcomes the not-yet-come in teaching and learning.

The last chapter (Chapter Five) discusses the meaning of silence, which is a theme that, for the most part, has not been much included in the studies of curriculum. Much of the research on teaching and learning ends with specific or general solutions of what we should know and what we should do. Moreover, curriculum researchers typically create new theories, concepts, language in their criticisms of the old theoretical approaches, and calls for actions of change.
However, this chapter, informed by the Daoist philosophy of nothingness, introduces ontological silence as an active performance in responding to the desire of certainty in education. Episteme has dominated the western tradition for too long. We appreciate words, language, and texts for their ability to express, speak for, and represent the others. However, language, especially verbal and written, has limited our way of thinking due to its representational nature. The literature on the study of silence reveals that scholars have studied silence in relation to a) the mastery of language; b) oppression and resistance; c) pedagogical strategies (i.e. waiting time) based on its epistemological meaning. In affirming the importance of previous research on silence, the researcher expands the meaning of silence by exploring silence from an ontological perspective. Ontological silence, as I argue, discloses itself into a relationship of being-with the Other, and calls for listening as ethical caring in the teacher-student relationship.

**The Significance of the Study**

This inquiry engages eastern and western philosophical notions in both the theoretical framework and methodological approach to dismantle humanism and knowlegism in educational practice. More specifically: 1) This study theoretically disrupts the privileging of knowledge and rationalism in school systems. While many researchers find a sense of security in being able to predict a replicable model for future practices, this study does not serve this purpose from the emergence of this topic. In moving beyond Cartesian episteme, this study calls for a “pedagogy of unknowing” in recognizing the essential role of ethics in education. 2) In disrupting traditional qualitative research, which centers on rigid research method, data, and fixed research conclusion, I set out on a pathway to embrace uncertainties through a Daoist Way of philosophical thinking. This study utilizes philosophy as the method to re-craft the boundaries between what is present, what is absent, and what is Other; to think about how inquiry deals with the fluidity, multiplicity, and the vagueness of reality within multiple cultural/intellectual traditions. Philosophy as method
connects the current perception and what might be through the re-imagination of the teacher-student relationship. 3) This study challenges an unnecessary hierarchy of thoughts in which western theorizing is favored over the diverse wisdom traditions and social practices of other cultures. In engaging philosophical traditions other than the west’s, this study embodies Asian philosophy with the aim to oppose the perpetuation of cognitive colonialism. Acknowledgment of the traditions outside of the west invites us back to that which has always existed, to that which was marginalized.
CHAPTER TWO
THE “WAY” OF PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING: PONDERING UNCERTAINTIES

The Way/Dao that can be named/specified, is not the enduring Way.
—Laozi

Method is a currere (Pinar, 1975), a process (Whitehead, 1929/1978), “It is regressive—progressive—analytical—synthetical. It is therefore temporal and conceptual in nature” (Pinar, 1975, p. 1). Philosophical thinking plays an essential role in my inquiry on the teacher-student relationship. Philosophical thinking enables researchers to look at “what is not yet the case, what is not yet present” (Pinar, 1975, p. 24). It does not only provide me the concepts in understanding the current teaching and learning practice—which shaped the teacher-student relationship—but also provides me with a critical lens to think about how different teacher-student relationships were made and how we might create different teacher-student relationships. This philosophical thinking as my way of inquiry is not the one that researchers often use in qualitative research; rather, it takes on a Daoist approach of Way\(^5\)—the Way that cannot be designed or specified. Without a clear starting point and a predetermined destination, I start this inquiry in the middle, on this plateau (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Deleuze and Guattari cite Gregory Bateson’s use of the word “plateau” to designate a “continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities” that does not develop in terms of a point of culmination or an external goal (i.e. Cartesian method). “A plateau emerges when the singularities of an individual or a plane that previously only ‘insisted’ in a concrete state of affairs are put into play through the actualization of connections that defy the imposition of external constraints” (Parr, 2005, p. 208). On this plateau, multiple philosophical concepts are connecting and vibrating in such an

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\(^5\) In distinguishing the Daoist way from the way that we commonly use, I will use the uppercase Way, indicating its Daoist’s root throughout this dissertation.
open system. Subsequently, this inquiry through philosophical thinking—which I chose as my “method”—is more like a conceptual play of the zigzag. The zigzag, as Mazzei and McCoy (2010) note, “is the lightning bolt spark of creation and the ‘crosscutting path from one conceptual flow to another’, a path set off by the spark of creation, unpredictable, undisciplined, anti-disciplinary, and non-static” (p. 505). Through the zigzag process this research aims to generate thinking and to ponder uncertainties.

This chapter follows the methodological foundations of the Way of philosophical thinking as a post qualitative inquiry in theoretically and methodologically escaping from the Cartesian epistemology. Both methodological and theoretical turns mark a new juncture in curriculum studies.

**Historical Underpinnings of Philosophical Thinking as Method**

Traditional scientific research methodology and conventional qualitative research methodology are based on the notion of certainty and continuity. However, new research approaches in both scientific and qualitative research, including quantum physics, new materialism, and post-structuralism, disrupt traditional epistemological views of the world such as “truth,” “continuity,” “certainty,” and “knowing.” Critics of conventional qualitative research believe that “there is no overarching sense of temporality, of continuity, or place. Each sense diffracts various temporalities within and across the field of spacetimemattering. The hope is that what comes across in this dis/joined movement is a felt sense of différance, of intra-activity, of agential separability – differentiating that cut together/apart – that is the hauntological nature of quantum entanglements” (Barad, 2010, pp.240-241. emphasis in original). Therefore, questions regarding research may shift from “which method we are going to choose?” to “how might we rethink method(s)?”
Qualitative research has been through several movements. Lather (2013) categorized those movements with 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 and 4.0 methodologies. As the views of the world change, the philosophies of method must be rethought. In this schema, QUAL 1.0 is the conventional interpretive inquiry that emerged from the liberal humanism of sociology and cultural anthropology. QUAL 1.0 specially focuses on standpoint epistemologies, a humanist subject, transparent descriptions of lived experiences, and the generally untroubled belief that better methods and richer descriptions can get closer to the truth. QUAL 2.0 begins to acknowledge multiple realities and voices but remains within humanist enclosure. Grounded in humanist concepts of language, reality, knowledge, power, truth, resistance, and the subject, “this field becomes centered, disciplined, regulated and normalized as qualitative handbooks, textbooks, and journals create ‘moments’ and ‘designs,’ and fix the ‘research process,’ so that it becomes possible to know it in advance” (p.635, emphasis in the original). QUAL 3.0 takes on a postmodern approach in questioning concepts associated with qualitative inquiry, including data, validity, voice, authenticity, experience, reflexivity, clarity, and the field. QUAL 4.0 is where the “post-qualitative” methodology emerged. Researchers, taking on a Deleuzian sense of becoming, begin to shift their views of qualitative research from “how should we do research in order to know?” to “how might we produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently?” through the methodology-to-come. Philosophical thinking as method, in alignment with “thinking with concept” (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012), “method assemblage” (Law, 2004), and “methodologies without methodology” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015), initiate “new lines of flight” in qualitative research. With a glimpse at the movements within the schema of qualitative research, I now turn to its historical context to further understand the trajectories and underpinnings of philosophy as method. However, the purpose of doing so is not striving to determine which
method is better than the others, but to take on Levinas’ notion of “responding” in order to
explore different ways of thinking about “research” and “methodology.”

Qualitative research operates in complex, interconnected disciplines, fields, and subject
matters (education, social work, communications, psychology, history, medical science,
anthropology, sociology, and so on). While more diverse cultural qualitative traditions,
especially indigenous traditions, have been recognized since the 1980s, the history of qualitative
research is still dominated by western scholars. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) summarize,
qualitative research in North America has been through eight historical stages which were
defined as: the traditional (1900-1950), the modernist or golden age (1950-1970), blurred genres
(1970-1986), the crisis of representation (1986-1990), the postmodern, a period of experimental
and new ethnographies (1990-1995), postexperimental inquiry (1995-2000), the
methodologically contested present (2000-2010) and future (2010-). Successive waves of
epistemological theorizing move across these eight movements. While the traditional period
focused on evidence-based social movement approaches, the future (eighth) confronts the
objective approach and asks that “the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical
communications about democracy, race, gender, class, nationstates, globalization, freedom, and
community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.2). Theoretically, the traditional period and the
modernist/golden age are associated with the positivist, foundational paradigm. This paradigm
holds that there are objective facts that can be generated, or that there is a foundational truth to
be found through rigorous qualitative analysis. Rigorous qualitative analysis had its golden age
during the modernist period. Blurred genres moments are connected to the postpositivist
arguments with the emergence of a variety of new interpretive qualitative perspectives, including
hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism.
Interpretation in contextualized texts or cultural texts was the dominant research approach. For
example, hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation, where the researcher is considered the authority. How we understand the texts, literature, and other phenomena depends on the researcher’s interpretation. Although blurred genres troubled the norms of rigorous qualitative research, it also produced the crisis of representation, which is the next stage. In this stage, researchers struggled with how to locate themselves and their subjects as products of texts.

In the post-modern stage, researchers continued to push the boundaries in “scientific” research by exploring research as evocative, moral, critical, ethical, and through local understandings of the world. For example, while in blurred genres researchers strived to represent the research objects (including the researchers themselves) with multiple methods, post-structuralists (e.g., Levinas and Deleuze) called for ethical responsibility in research and expanded understandings of qualitative research as always implicating power. While structuralists focused on the analysis of language (e.g., discourse analysis and psychoanalysis), post-structuralists rejected the self-sufficiency of the structure and interrogated the binary oppositions that constitute power structures. More current movements in qualitative research include postexperimental inquiry, the methodologically contested present, and the future focus on a broader range of perspectives compared to the traditional period. Those current movements consider qualitative research as an open process rather than a well-designed path to conclusions. Several key elements in traditional movements were integrated or abandoned in this post, or post “post”, period (St. Pierre, 2004; Law, 2004; Lather, 2007, 2013, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), such as “method,” “data,” “researcher,” “data analysis,” and “voice.” Throughout these different ongoing movements of qualitative research, there is only one thing assured by qualitative researchers in different genres: the future of qualitative research privileges no single methodological practice over another. “Methodologies without methodology” (Koro-Ljunberg, 2016) might be the new possibility in the future of qualitative research.
Denzin and Lincoln have provided a well-defined chronological history of qualitative research based on different assumptions of epistemology, ontology, and methodology. This section will follow the moments in the history of qualitative research defined by Denzin and Lincoln in their review of its ongoing differentiating processes and tensions, but not necessarily using the same timeline as they do. Instead, based on the epistemological and ontological assumptions of different perspectives, I combine the traditional qualitative research period and the modernist or golden age together as a traditional period that lasts from the 1900s to 1970s. Then I will move to the blurred genres (1970-1986) and the crisis of representation (1986-1990). Lastly, I will talk about the challenges from the “post” periods—post-modern, post-experimental, post-structural and post-qualitative perspectives—which go from the 1990s to now.

The Traditional Period (1900-1970s)

What we now call traditional or conventional qualitative research appeared in the early 1900s and was connected to the positivist, foundational paradigm. The theoretical idea of positivism is that there is an objective world about which we can gather data and then verify this data through empirical approaches. “In this period, qualitative researchers wrote ‘objective,’ colonizing accounts of field experiences that were reflective of the positivist scientific paradigm; they were concerned with offering valid, reliable, and objective interpretations in their writings. The ‘Other’ whom they studied was alien, foreign, and strange” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.15).

Rigorous approach in qualitative research had its “golden age” from 1950-1970s. During this period, qualitative researchers (e.g., Becker, et al., 1961, 1970/1958) attempted to make qualitative methodology as rigorous as quantitative research, from research design, quasi-structured interviews, and detailed participant observations, to careful analyses of data through coding and decoding. Becker describes the use of quasi-statistics in his article “Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation”: 
Participant observations have occasionally been gathered in the standardized form capable of being transformed into legitimate statistical data. But the exigencies of the field usually prevent the collection of data in such a form to meet the assumptions of statistical tests, so that the observer deals with what have been called 'quasi-statistics.' (p.31)

Becker’s conclusions, while implicitly numerical, do not require precise quantification. Qualitative researchers in this period valorized villains and outsiders as heroes to mainstream society. Traditional qualitative movements dominated qualitative research until the 1970s and are still present in recent scholarly works such as Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Ryan and Bernard (2000). The limitations of evidence-based traditional qualitative research have been recognized and challenged in various subjects since the 1970s, such as narrative inquiry (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), phenomenology (van Manen, 1982; Langeveld, 1983a; 1983b), and cultural studies (Geertz, 1973). That was when the blurred genres period started, as I will discuss in next section.

**Blurred Genres and the Crisis of representation (1970-1990s)**

After the modernist or golden age, researchers relied on a variety of new interpretive, qualitative perspectives including narrative inquiry, hermeneutics, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, cultural studies, and feminism. From the 1960s, qualitative researchers used theories like phenomenology, critical theory, and feminist theory (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), so that they could highlight a variety of voices, especially from marginalized populations. By the 1970s, qualitative researchers had a full complement of paradigms, methods, and strategies to employ in their research, which Denzin and Lincoln (2005) call the period of “blurred genres.” These theories include constructivism, naturalistic inquiry, positivism and postpositivism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, critical theory, neo-Marxist theory, semiotics, structuralism, feminism, and various racial/ethnic paradigms. The common theme among all these research perspectives is that the humanities became a central resource for critical, interpretive theory and
the qualitative research project broadly conceived. Specifically, Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) and *Local knowledge* (1983) have disrupted the authority of researchers from the perspective of cultural representations and interpretations. Geertz (1988) critiques the subjectivity of researchers with a question: How can the researcher speak with authority in an age when there are no longer any firm rules concerning the text, including the author’s place in it, its standards of evaluation, and its subject matter? Qualitative research at this period was understood as interpretation and interpreting the interpretations in contextual texts.

In addition, former colonial scholars also critiqued on traditional research. Specifically, Linda Smith (1999) critiqued the colonization of the indigenous world by researchers. As she argues, the term “research” is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. “The word itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary… It is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism with the way in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified, and then represented back to the West” (p.1). This dirty word stirs up anger, silence, distrust. It is one of colonialism’s most sordid legacies. Subsequently, qualitative research, in many if not all of its forms (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography), serves as the metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power. Based on this metaphor, research provides the foundation for reports about and representations of the marginalized others.

The period of blurred genres produced the crisis of representation due to 1) the metaphysics notion of presence, which presumes the preexistence of reality, and 2) the overemphasized contextualized narratives and interpretation. Scholarly works during this period, including *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus & Fischer, 1986), *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) and *Works and Lives* (Geertz, 1988), made research and writing more reflective and called into question the issues of gender, class, and race. About the crises of representation, Green (1994) discusses it from a postmodern perspective. By representation, she
is referring to the modernism discourse grounded in the metaphysics of presence, which
presumes the preexistence of reality, often hidden in the deep but inviting search and re-search,
and often successfully leading to findings. For Green, the major purpose of pointing out the crisis
of representation is criticizing the way the hegemony of representative discourse erases the
descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world
on its own—unaided by the describing activities of human beings… cannot” (p. 5). The
epistemological representation during this period enabled our movement towards a
knowledge/understanding of what the world is really like, once and for all, which is a violence of research.

Post-colonial scholars during this period, (e.g. Smith, 1999) and even the current period
(e.g., Tuck & Young, 2014a, 2014b), tried to disrupt the “violence” of research by decolonizing
methodology through research within different indigenous communities. They believed qualitative
research was not only about claiming, but also about refusing to claim with respect to the others.
As Tuck & Young (2014b) argue,

Refusal makes space for recognition, and for reciprocity. Refusal turns the gaze of authority
back upon power, specifically, the colonial modalities of knowing persons as bodies to be
differentially counted, violated, saved, and put to work. … Refusal generates and expands,
championing representational territories that colonial knowledge endeavors to settle, enclose, domesticate. We again insist that refusal is not just a no, but is a generative,
analytic practice. (p. 817)

Speaking for the other or claiming for the other is another form of violence: the violence of
representation. Tuck and Young called for a hesitation and refusal of representation to further
push back the boundaries created by representation.
Posts (post-modern, post-structural, post-qualitative) Challenges (1990s-)

Challenges from postmodernists and poststructuralists in qualitative research emerged in the mid-1990s. Postmodern and poststructural methodologies required scholars “to abandon all established and all preconceived values, theories, perspectives… and prejudices as resources for ethnographic study” as Vidich and Lyman (2000) argue. Postmodern and poststructural qualitative movements disrupted traditional qualitative research from several perspectives: First, qualitative researchers would no longer represent the lived experiences of the others. Lived experience, “is created in the social text written by the researcher”, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.19) argue. The researchers’ narrative of the subject’s lived experience is not authentic. Instead, the researchers’ narrative caused the representational crisis. Secondly, postmodern and poststructural researchers disrupted the rigorous research procedure. Thirdly, scholars who took on a postmodern and poststructural approach argued that instead of seeking one “best method”, qualitative research as a process should embrace multiple methodologies.

During the “post” approach in qualitative research, a related set of intuitions informed postmodernist, post-structuralist philosophers, such as Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984, 1992), Michel Foucault (1982, 1988), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, 1996), and Jacques Derrida (1976,1997). A common approach shared by these scholars is a complex, relational, and fluid understanding of the world. Instead of assuming that there is a specific external reality upon which we can ground our efforts to know the world, these scholars mobilized metaphors such as “flux” to index the sense that whatever there is in the world cannot be properly or finally caught in the webs of inquiry found in science and social science (or indeed any other form of knowing). Educational scholars who relied on these philosophers’ thoughts shifted qualitative research from a traditional epistemological view to an “ontological turn,” as St. Pierre (2013) points out. Scholars whose works fell into the fields of “posts” (postmodernism, poststructuralism,
posthumanism and postcolonialism) such as Braidotti (1994), Law (2004), Lather (2007), St. Pierre (2011, 2013, 2014), and Jackson & Mazzei (2011), provided a diversity of analyses to interrogate the traditional notions of qualitative research. This shift was further expanded with newly emerged scholarly works, such as “new empiricism” (e.g. Clough, 2009), “new materialism” (e.g. Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost 2010; Mol, 2002), and “post-humanism” (Braidotti, 2013; Baudrillard, J., 2012; Weaver, 2010). These works quickly spread to different subjects and urge us to reconsider the taken-for-granted concepts in conventional qualitative research, like “data collection” (Thompson & Adams, 2013; Mazzei, 2013), “data analysis” (Jackson, 2013), “method” (Law, 2004; Hendry et al, 2018), and the overall meaning of “research” (St. Pierre, 1997, 2013).

Examining the development of qualitative research in its historical field makes it clear that qualitative research means different things in each of these moments; no single method is privileged over another. Also, it is clear that there are more methods than ever before for researchers to choose from. We are in the moment of discovery and rediscovery, as new ways of looking, interpreting, arguing, and writing are debated and discussed. More importantly, “the qualitative research act can no longer be viewed from within a neutral or objective positivist perspective. Class, race, gender, and ethnicity shape inquiry, making research a multicultural process” as Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 8) point out. The concept of assemblage, which recognizes the complex entanglement of human, culture, agency, and all the other matters of the world, might be helpful in reimagining “method” as I will discuss in the next section. As Law (2004) writes,

The world is so rich that our theories about it will always fail to catch more than part of it; that there is therefore a range of possible theories about a range of possible processes; that those theories and processes are probably irreducible to one another, and, finally, that
we cannot step outside the world to obtain an overall ‘view from nowhere’ which pastes all the theory and processes together. (p.8)

The world is rich and complex; meanwhile, there are multiple methods that cannot be isolated from each other. It is from this sense that this dissertation calls for a turn from method to “method assemblage” in a post-qualitative perspective.

**Philosophical Thinking as a Plateau: Core Concepts**

Philosophical thinking includes several concepts that open up new possibilities for thinking about education. “The greatness of philosophy is measured by the nature of the events to which its concepts summon us or that it enables us to release in concepts” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p.34). And these concepts are what made philosophical thinking as a method possible and important.

**The World as “Generative Flux”**

The world does not consist in a discoverable shape or linear timeline, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987). According to the notion of linearity, you can go back to a certain period on the timeline as it was or visit the same place twice. However, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the world is not structured either by linear frame or a dichotomous structure (i.e. subject vs object); it is entangled in multiplicities. For example, whenever one tells of something that happened in the past, it is impossible to tell it exactly as it happened because the distillation of the experience into words is necessarily different than the way in which one lived the events. Story telling does not say the event, but makes the event, according to Derrida (2007). Saying things as they are presented is “a statement of knowledge or information, a sort of cognitive saying of description” (Derrida, 2007, p.446). This telling of the event always comes after the event; therefore, it never says the event. Further, saying the event always fails to capture its singularity, since the structure of language is bound to a measure of generality, integrability, and repeatability. The event is
absolutely singular, it is neither foreseeable nor repeatable. It is from this sense that post-
qualitative research claims that the world is entangled within and across the field of
“spacetimemattering” (Barad, 2010, p.240).

Post-qualitative research allows us to participate more in the making of the reality or
spacetimematter. As Deleuze (1990) says,

The problem in western philosophies is in sometimes reducing the Other to a particular
object, and sometimes to another subject. The self is, for Deleuze, the development and
the explication of what is possible, the process of its realization in the actual. The Other,
as structure, is the expression of a possible world: it is the expressed, grasped as not yet
existing outside of that which expresses it. In other words, “Other = an expression of a
possible world” (p.310).

In disrupting the subject-object dichotomy, Deleuze and Guattari bring out the “principle of
multiplicity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Multiplicity is arguably Deleuze’s most important
concept, as well as one of the most difficult concepts to grasp because of the many different
ways and contexts in which he puts it to work. Yet, there are some essential traits to be noted. A
multiplicity is, in the most basic sense, a complex structure that does not reference a prior unity.
As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain:

It is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive ‘multiplicity’ that it
ceases to have any relation to the One as subject or object, natural or spiritual reality,
image and the world. Multiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent
pseudomultiplicities for what they are. There is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object,
or to divide in the subject. There is not even the unity to abort in the object or ‘return’ in
the subject. A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations,
magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity
changing in nature. (p.8)

Deleuze and Guattari take on the idea that any situation is composed of different multiplicities
that form a kind of patchwork or ensemble without becoming a totality or whole. In other words,
multiplicities are not parts of a greater whole that have been fragmented, and they cannot be
considered manifold expressions of a single concept or transcendent unity. There is no essence of
particular multiplicities which can remain unaffected by encounters with others. From this sense, Deleuze opposes the dichotomy of subject/object, in all of its forms, with multiplicity. The concept of multiplicity makes no reference to a transcendent realm of the world that contains the structures or laws of existence. Multiplicities always make continued movements and changes, even at the points where the world or structure seems solid or rigid. Qualitative research based on the understanding of the world as entanglement will move far away from the method, which was assumed as a procedure, technique, or way of doing something in accordance with a definite design. Rather than fixed processes, the method could be maps and traces. Consequently, surprises, complexities, and disruptions may appear in fluid methodological spaces; multiple forms of “texts” including music, pictures, maps, 3D tangible objects, leaves, or water may become the new “text structure” in representing the entanglement of the world. In addition, fluid methodologies can open up or turn to the concepts and practices associated with methodology, which are already there without claiming them as a new paradigm. The concepts of being and philosophy are two such concepts that I believe should be brought back to method.

**Deleuzian Concept**

Concept challenges our understandings of the world and enables philosophy as method in the human sciences. “The greatness of philosophy is measured by the nature of the events to which its concepts summon us or that it enables us to release in concepts” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p.34). According to Deleuze and Guattari, every concept is a multiplicity with multiple components. Their notion of concept could be understood from three aspects:

1) Every concept is a multiplicity in complex relations. Traditional concept was understood as an irregular contour which was defined by the sum of its components. Western philosophers such as Plato and Bergson conceived concept as matter of articulation which cuts and defines boundaries. However, Deleuze (1994) argues that the concept is not a totality of its
components, “it is fragmentary whole” (p.16). Only on this condition can it escape the mental chaos constantly threatening it, stalking it, and trying to reabsorb it.

2) Every concept is a multiplicity in its becoming. The concept no longer constitutes an abstract signifier of a phenomenon with an agreed-upon meaning, but is itself an act, a verb, something created from and physically lived within a specific plane of thinking (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). The concept captures the event in an ongoing process of doing (sense-making) and becoming (difference) in its multiplicity of inseparable variations.

3) Concepts do not purely or metaphysically exist; they are all connected to problems. As Deleuze (1994) writes, “all concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning, and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges. We are dealing here with a problem concerning the plurality of subjects, their relationship, and their reciprocal presentation” (p.16).

While “traditional paradigms mold, discipline, test, tweak, digitalize, approve, surveille, and treat anything and everything alike” (Koro-Ljungberg, Carlson, Tesar, & Anderson, 2014, p.615), philosophy as method will be in thinking the unthinkable. According to Deleuze, “Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth” (Deleuze,1991/1994, p. 85). “Territory and earth,” Deleuze explains, they are two components “with two zones of indiscernibility—deterritorialization (from territory to the earth) and reterritorialization (from earth to territory). We cannot say which comes first”. Therefore, a concept is both absolute and relative: “it is relative to its own components, to other concepts, to the plane on which it is defined, and to the problems it is supposed to resolve; but it is absolute through the condensation it carries out, the site it occupies on the plane, and the conditions it assigns to the problem” (Deleuze, 1994, p.21). Therefore, post-qualitative research
allows us to engage with philosophy, concept, and disciplinary knowledge that lead to the rethinking of ontological, epistemological, and ethical notions. Under this notion, philosophy as method is an engagement, an ethical relationship with thought. “Philosophy as a method brings theory into the practice and ontologies into the research processes” (Koro-Ljungberg, et al. 2014, p.5). The concept captures a material-semiotic event in an ongoing process of doing (sense making) and becoming (differing) in its multiplicity of inseparable variations. It is that temporary arrest of comprehension—as the event is “taken in for questioning” as it were—which might reconfigure the event, the problem, and the concept itself.

**Derridean “Différance”**

Distinguished from the notion of “difference”, Derrida creates the motif of “différance”, which marked by a silent “a” to indicate its “productive and conflictual characteristics” (Derrida,1981, p. 44). According to Derrida, différance is more than a concept or simply a word, “it cannot be elevated into a master-word or a master-concept, since it blocks every relationship to theology”; différance finds itself enmeshed in the work that pulls it through a chain of other “concepts,” other “words,” other textual configurations (Derrida, 1981, p.40). Différance constitutes all phenomena, but it doesn’t have power. Différance is nothing, it is basically just spacing, so it is everywhere. Derrida (1981) writes, “différance is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological-ontological-reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which ontotheology-philosophy-produces its system and its history, it includes ontotheology, inscribing it and exceeding it without return” (p.6). Différance is irreducible to any fixed theories or conclusions, it is an always spacing process. While différance constitutes the phenomena, it simultaneously deconstructs it as well.

Derrida explains the four meanings of différance during an interview by Ronse. First, “différance refers to the (active and passive) movement that consists in deferring by means of
delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving” (Derrida, 1981, p.8). What differs presence, as Derrida says, “is the very basis on which presence is announced or desired in what represents it, its sign, its trace…”. The notion of “differance” through various movements is one important feature in his theory of deconstruction. Deconstruction is primarily a changing process, a process of “differing”. Secondly, “the movement of différance, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, is the common root of all the oppositional concepts that mark our language” (Derrida, 1981, p.9). The movement of différance happens everywhere. Thirdly, “the concept of différance is neither simply structuralist, nor simply geneticist, such an alternative itself being an “effect” of différance” (Derrida, 1981, p.9). Différance is not produced by any subjects, it différance by itself. As with deconstruction, it happens by itself, within itself. In other words, there is no outside speaking subject of deconstruction as such. Finally, différance would “name provisionally this unfolding of difference, in particular, but not only, or first of all, of the ontico-ontological difference” (Derrida, 1981, p.10). Différance is no longer determined, as Heideggerian thought establishes the differences between beings and Being, the latter being a continual folding, unfolding process.

In examining the research process from the notion of différance, I argue that research can be a fluid process without a “master-word” or “master-concept”. The process of thinking and writing in research will never be stable; it is an ongoing eventful process. Différance, as well as Deleuze’s concept, are verbs in the process of thinking with philosophy.

**Method Assemblage**

Method, as traditionally understood from an epistemological perspective, provides specific procedures, techniques, or ways of doing something in accordance with a definite plan and predetermined destination, and it is no longer sustainable in the period of post-qualitative research. The “posts” perspectives provide different approaches and possibilities of qualitative
research grounded in an ethico-onto-epistemological view that resists all claims of representation. I agree with Law (2004) that we need to unmake many of our methodological habits, including:

the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more or less stable conclusions about the way things really are; the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality; and the expectations of generality that are wrapped up in what is often called ‘universalism.’ But, first of all we need to unmake our desire and expectation for security. (p.9)

Openness to uncertainty is one main idea that post-qualitative research reveals. From this perspective, there is no universal truth, no certainty; the future is not pre-determined but entangled with the present and past. No dominant voice can stand out over all the others, everything is “entangled” in “assemblages” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1978). Instead of a single method, “method assemblages” (Law, 2004, p.42) are what guide the thinking of this dissertation’s research methodology. Such approach of “troubling method” (Hendry, Mitchell & Eaton, 2018) invites us to rethink ways of inquiry from an ethical, relational perspective.

An assemblage, as Helen Verran and David Turnbull (1995) state, “is like an episteme with technologies added but connotes the ad hoc contingency of a collage in its capacity to embrace a wide variety of incompatible components. It also has the virtue of connoting active and evolving practices rather than a passive and static structure” (p.117). The notion of the assemblage not only indicates the entangled relationship in qualitative research but also reveals an ongoing dynamic process of research. Assemblage is a process of bundling, of assembling, or better, of recursive self-assembling in which the elements put together are not fixed in shape. They do not belong to a larger pre-given list but are constructed, at least in part, as they are entangled together.
From method to method assemblage, the philosophy of method changed from a positivist perspective to a fluid view. Method assemblage proposes the notion of “entanglement” in understanding the world and embraces “being” in the assemblage.

The Dismantling of Humanist Power Structures

If seeking truth is the essence of humanist research, questions like “who has the truth?” and “who makes the standards on truths?” are not avoidable in the discourse. “Knowledge linked to power”, as Foucault (1977) points out,

Not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself real. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, ‘become true’. Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations. (p.27)

In humanist qualitative research, the assumption is that the essentialist subject produces the voice. The concepts of subject and object are among the most general concept categories, which we possess in humanist research. With regard to the traditional qualitative research method, Pierre (2014) points out that it was the epistemological methodology rooted in the Cartesian concept that slowed us down centuries ago and sent us toward a new order of things whose distribution favors hierarchies and binaries like mind/body, man/nature, and knower/known in which, as Foucault (1966/1970) noted, the figure of man is empirically constituted by life itself and then designated the author of meaning in that empirical order, the interpreter of life with all its limits, i.e. the knowing subject. (p.14)

The knowing subject indicates two core concepts in epistemological methodology: humanism and knowledge. Ontologically, humanism refers to the ways of thinking about human-ness that are essential and universal, with a single defining quality that is shared by everyone. Davies (1997) further explains that “humanism signifies something that is everywhere and always the
same… it is a condition, timeless and localized” (pp.24, 32). Accordingly, it follows that the constant theme of essentialism can be used as a “precondition, even a definition, of humanism” (Davies, 1997, p.124). Humanism draws from rationalist philosophers from the seventeenth century who claimed that knowledge of the world is mediated by innate structures of large social systems and human activity and that these abstract systems lead to a universal, unchanging structure of reality. For example, Descartes (1637/1998) believes that man, as a rational subject, has the capacity for discovering truths through certain methods. His method, based on mathematics, consists of following certain rules for thinking in an orderly way so that we can know something with absolute clarity.

The critics of traditional qualitative methods argue that humans are neither unique individuals that exist ahead of the world nor have authority over all other objects. Instead, humans are entangled with the rest of the world, and there is no dominant voice over the other voices. New materialism, for example, argues that human beings, space, time, and matter are in “intra-active” (Barad, 2007) relations. On the other hand, humanists believe humanness is essential and universal. Classic philosophers like Descartes and Kant clearly argue that humanism includes beliefs in radical individualism and rational judgment. Regardless of the type logical thinking employed, the foundational assumption of traditional qualitative research is that the world (including human beings, animals, plants, and all other matter both in macroscopic and microcosmic scale) are knowable by the knowing subject, as long as we find the right methods with supportive tools. Accordingly, “to know,” “to seek the truth,” and “to control” have been the priority of conventional humanist research. However, a series of new questions emerged in post qualitative research, such as: What counts as knowledge, and whose knowledge counts? How does knowledge become foundational in its aim to secure truth, the imbrication of knowledge and its relations to power and ethics? How can certain knowledge be marginalized
while others become dominant? However, a complex view of qualitative research argues that there are no clear distinctions among human, animal, and machine. Therefore, as posthumanist curriculum theorist John Weaver (2010) claims, the posthuman “implies the merging of humans and machines in order to enhance or improve human capabilities” (p.11). St. Pierre (2014) traces the history of qualitative research back to the 1980s and states its limitations:

Even texts that claimed to be ‘interpretive’ or ‘critical’ retained positivist structuring concepts like objective, bias, data, coding data, grounded theory, saturation, audit trails, inter-rater reliability, triangulation, and systematicity, even as they introduced phenomenological concepts like voice, lived experiences, narrative and /or critical concepts like authenticity, agency, emancipation, transformation, social justice, and oppression. The structure, indeed, deconstructs itself. (p.6)

Traditional qualitative research, which continued the Cartesian tradition, was not only used to process knowledge, but also designated knowledge as an object. To disrupt the Cartesian structure in qualitative research, St. Pierre (2014) asks researchers to leave “qualitative methodology behind and begin with theory(ies) and concept(s) that enable different ‘conceptual practices’ that may or may not include qualitative methods” (p.3). A few suggestions she gives for doing that kind of new research include: 1) leaving qualitative methodology behind, 2) studying theory, 3) beginning research with theories and concepts instead of a method, and 4) trusting yourself and getting to work. In this statement, method comes not at the beginning of a study but at the end, and it helps us to reflect on what we have done and why.

What was revealed through the discussion above is that the power structure was created by humans under the notion of truth. However, under a post-qualitative approach, the concepts of “data” and “data analysis” have distinctively different meanings. Scholars such as Mazzei (2013) view data as “voice without organs”, as she writes: “interview data, the voices of participants, cannot be thought of as emanating from an essentialist subject and cannot be separated from
enactment in which they are produced, an enactment among researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis—what I call here a Voice without Organs (VwO)” (Mazzei, 2013, p.732). Rather than directly leading to research findings and conclusions, data analysis could also be the thinking process itself as practiced in “concept as method,” (St Pierre, 2014) “philosophy as method,” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2014) and “thinking with theories” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

**The Way of Philosophical Thinking**

Thinking through philosophical concepts doesn’t mean to pin down any one meaning. Instead, philosophical thinking lets concepts “reverberate expressing more of the variation in their sense through the shifting contexts in which they are put to use” (The Deleuze Dictionary, 2005, p. 208). Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2014) asserts that qualitative inquiry enables thinking the once unthinkable thoughts. In particular, she asks:

> How can anyone “predict” future-to-come or describe the absent-present or absent-future-presence of qualitative inquiry without being sidetracked? By fleeting presuppositions. By our human-ness. By that bug on the wall over there. By eggplant. How can one think about presence or future of something that is under erasure—something without origins and something one needs to let go as soon as she or he starts to use it? Deleuze (1990) wrote “instead of a present which absorbs the past and future, a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum into past and future, in both directions at once.” (p. 164) (p. 613)

While traditional qualitative researchers and methodologists may argue that the illusory nature of an absent future-present sidetracks us from the very real present, I argue that (re)thinking absent-future-present is a rhizomatic engagement, the creation of maps not tracing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

From the review of the history of qualitative research, it becomes clear that the systematic view of why to combine ethics, ontology, and epistemology has been the key theme in post-qualitative inquiry. According to Bateson (1972), all qualitative researchers are philosophers in a “universal sense in which all human beings … are guided by highly abstract
principles” (p.320). These principles combine beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and methodology; and these beliefs shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it. Postmodernists and poststructuralists such as Lyotard, Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida have inspired scholars (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; St, Pierrice, 2011) to “think with theories” in post-qualitative research. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s thoughts on concept, as well as Derrida’s concept of “différance”, I will turn to a discussion on the meaning of philosophy as method, why philosophy as method is a possible approach in post qualitative research, and how it will be used in my dissertation research.

Under the notions of the Deleuzian concept and the Derridean différance, qualitative research is not aiming to figure out the best method, but “methodologies without methodology” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015a) or method assemblage. Philosophy as method is not purely a theoretical/metaphysical discussion that does not correlate to practice. Actually “all concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning, and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges. We are dealing here with a problem concerning the plurality of subjects, their relationship, and their reciprocal presentation” (Deleuze, 1991/1994, p.16). Utilizing philosophy as method in thinking about the problems in practice challenges the traditional purpose and process of data analysis. Philosophy as method is not to figure out “what they are but what they do. By doing data analysis in/of/as the mangle, “we cannot separate discursive practices from their production in/of/as the material. Nor can we fail to take into account the material effects of discursive practice” (Jackson, 2013, p.747). The reason for looking at data analysis as mangled is that “it allows us to stop expecting to separate the elements of the mangle and find the ‘right’ answer. The right answer is that we are in the mangle” (Hekman, 2010, p.26).
Furthermore, philosophy as method embodied with the ontological turn of qualitative research is an engagement, “an ethical relationship with thought. Philosophy as a method brings theory into the practice and ontologies into the research processes” (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2014, p.5). “Post qualitative” (St. Pierre, 2011) under the “post” theories, prioritizes ontology over epistemology, but does not isolate the epistemological, ontological, and methodological views. “Ontology”, as Pierre claims, “was a high priority for ‘post’ theorists, and their critiques of representational logic and phenomenology, … are important in undermining ontologies based on a particular understanding of human being” (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 649). Solely talking about methodology from an epistemological perspective results in it being mechanized and reduced to methods, process, and technique. However, when we talk about method, we are not just dealing with a method. Method is not merely a set of techniques or a philosophy of method. “It is not even simply about the kinds of realities that we want to recognize or the kinds of worlds we might hope to make it. It is also, and most fundamentally, about a way of being” (Law, 2004, p.10). Method is not only about method but also about being, from both ontological and ethical perspectives.

Embracing ontology and ethics in method is not aiming to explain what a thing is, what procedure we need to get to a certain destination, and how to prove it is true; it is to bring meaning into research, to embrace ontology and ethics into research. As a result, all the methods involved in research are method assemblages because, “they detect, resonate with, and amplify particular patterns of relation in the excessive and overwhelming fluxes of the real” (Law, 2004, p. 14). Philosophy as method is one methodological approach which brings ontology and ethics to knowing; it is an ethico-onto-epistemological methodological approach. And the concept and philosophical texts I draw on are the “data assemblage,” as I have discussed in this methodological shift.
Philosophy as method embraces the ontological, epistemological, and ethical views in research. With the emergence of postmodern and poststructural theories in education since the 1980s (Lyotard, 1984/1979; Doll, 1993; Derrida, 1978, 1982), philosophy as method has become more diverse with the development of socialized fields and new areas of interest based on subject areas, specific groups, or political orientations such as feminism, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, citizenship education, and indigenous/intercultural education. The legacy of the linguistic turn could be seen as a reminder of western-anglo-centric philosophies. The postepistemological methodology turns the centrality of meaning in language into new ways of “reading” the conditions and the endeavor of (post)qualitative inquiry. “Philosophy as a method brings theory into the practice and ontologies into the research processes” (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2014, p.5). Philosophy as a method represents a potential yet functional oxymoron and intriguing paradox, forcing readers and users of methodology to give up their potentially fixed and overly normative uses and definitions of a ‘method.’ When philosophy is brought into a method, method can no longer be treated as an objective set of procedures, automated activity, or predetermined and simplified task. Instead, philosophies create movement and diversity within ‘methods’, when thinking and doing blend and interact continuously and seamlessly. According to Law (2004), method is a way of being and a type of science (about ontological decisions) it chooses to practice. Instead of providing answers, philosophy as method questions the answers, conclusions we already believe, or the phenomena we take for granted; it is the “body without organs.” According to Deleuze and Guattari (1978), the body without organs “is not a dead body but a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown part the organism and its organization” (p.30). Disrupting the goals of seeking truth within a certain linear process or fixed structures, philosophy as method is the assemblage of becoming.
Concluding Thoughts: Laozi’s Way

In this study, philosophy as method provides an ‘ethico-onto-epistemological’ view on re-imagining teaching, learning, and teacher-student relationships by bringing ethics and being into method. Specifically, this research will bring several concepts into the fluid methodological spaces of thinking, including Levinas’ philosophy on ‘ethics’ (1969), ‘otherness’ (1981), ‘totality and infinity’ (1969), Barad’s concept of ‘intra-action’ (2007), Derrida’s philosophy of ‘différance’ (1982), and the Daoist notion of ‘Dao’ (BC516). In these fluid methodological spaces, no one concept is more important than the others, none of the concepts is more fundamental than the others. All these concepts and thoughts are entangled as method assemblages. In Chapter Three I will specifically discuss how these philosophical concepts are interrelated and how thinking with philosophy will guide me in thinking through the limits and boundaries in educational research.

Thus far, I hope the readers of this study may have some agreements with me on the limitations of conventional qualitative method and the new possibilities for the future of qualitative research. But there are also a few things I feel necessary to address again to avoid any possible misinterpretation of this chapter: 1) Firstly, I am not saying there is no room for conventional method, especially for scientific research. The essential question is what attitude should educational scholars have for specific research methods and how might we use the research findings. 2) Secondly, this chapter proposes a philosophical “method assemblage” to replace method, which calls for a more generous, fluid approach to method(s). As with the Way from Taoism, any single method that claims to be the best method is not the method we need. 3) Finally, if we consider research to be a journey, researchers should ponder on uncertainties through the process of inquiry rather than inquiring the certainty.
CHAPTER THREE
TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP AS INTRA-ACTION

This chapter explores the teacher-student relationship through an intra-active dialogue with Laozi, Levinas, Barad and Deleuze & Guattari. “Intra-action,” a concept from Barad (2007), is a notion that opposes the usual notion of interaction. Interaction assumes that there are individual, independently-existing entities or agents that preexist their acting upon one another. By contrast, the notion of intra-action questions the familiar sense of causality and the metaphysics of individualism. According to Barad, individuals do not preexist but rather materialize in intra-action. Intra-action questions the making of differences, of individuals, rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. Importantly, saying individuals do not preexist does not mean they do not exist at all, but that they only exist within, or as part of, the phenomena in the ongoing intra-active diffraction and reconfiguration.

This chapter draws on the notion of intra-action for two reasons. First, teachers and students do not exist independently, nor do they exist merely as a subject/object binary. In this dissertation, I argue that teachers and students are in an intra-active relationship, which is an ongoing differentiating relationship. The nature of relation is that there can never be one focus only. Second, none of the philosophers I draw on are isolated from the others. Levinas’ philosophy of ethics disrupts the western ontological understanding of the relationship. Similar to Levinas, Laozi believes ethics—“De” in Chinese—along with “Dao”—speak the harmonious relationship between human and nature. And Barad emphasizes the transformative relationship between human and nature by recognizing the agency of the materials and the intra-active mo(ve)ments of the world. Deleuze and Guattari consider the relationship of human and nature as entangled in the rhizome to further express the dynamic of intra-actions and its openness. All of them consider relations as the key to understanding the human activities within and as part of the world, while each of them have their unique ways in knowing-being such relations.
From an ethico-onto-epistemological perspective, this chapter interrogates how educators and curriculum theorists might begin re-conceptualizing our understanding of teacher-student relationship. An ethico-onto-epistemological perspective is very much like the concept of relationality that I introduced in Chapter One. Such a relationship is entangled, ongoing, transformative, and dynamic, in which the knowing, being, and ethics are woven together as they originally are in Being. The entanglement of the knowing, being, and ethics does not emphasize the order of the three; rather it is a holistic perspective. As I have discussed in Chapter One, the western philosophy has been to focus on the individual, on the ego, as the principle unit of reasoning. Levinas shifts the relationship of individuals to the “face-to-face” relationship between the self and the Other. The face-to-face, according to Levinas, is not melding the self and the other in totalization, but always being receptive at the present to the Other. However, Levinas’ ethics is mainly about relations for human beings; he didn’t address many relations beyond that. Laozi extended the relations from humans to the universe, as the human is part of the harmonious relationship between human and nature. For Laozi, it is not only that human has a responsibility to the Other, but human also has a responsibility to nature, to the universe in which we all live; and vice versa—nature nurtures human beings in its own way too. Deleuze and Guattari, in attune to Laozi’s broader view of relationship, challenge the linear, genealogical way of thinking about relationship (i.e. teacher-student relationship) with the concepts of rhizome, plateau, multiplicities, and becoming; that is, everything is entangled in multiplicities. There is no beginning, no end; it is always in the process of becoming. Lastly, Barad, drawing from continental philosophers including Levinas and Derrida, and quantum physics (especially Niels Bohr), created the concept of “intra-action” to describe the ongoing relations of knowing, being, and ethics – the “ethico-onto-epistemological” relationship. Inspired by quantum physics, Barad asserts that the matter in the universe has agency too, which echoes Laozi’s philosophy.
that human and nature are united in oneness. Further, she emphasizes the ongoing process of becoming, which from another perspective attunes to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic assemblage.

Informed by the philosophers above, this study will expand the current understanding of teacher-student relationship using four pairs of relationships—a) self and the other; b) human and nature; c) knowing and unknowing; d) silence and language as shown in Figure 1. As the main chapter in discussing relations by re-examining different understandings of “knowing,” “being,” “ethics” and the relationship among the three, Chapter Three covers the first three pairs of relationships I list above. Chapter Four will mainly focus on the relationship of knowing and unknowing, but also refers to the relationship of self and other, human and nature. Chapter Five will focus on language and silence, which build on the discussion of knowing and unknowing, self and other, human and nature.

Knowing: From Epistemological and to Ethical Knowing

“I think, therefore I am” is not the universal credo, as Descartes advocated. From both a post-humanist and new materialist perspective, knowing is not a capacity that is the exclusive birthright of the human. Knowing is not a rational activity by the human subject; instead it is a “specific engagement of the world where part of the world becomes differentially intelligible to another part of the world in its differential accountability to and for that of which it is a part” (Barad, 2007, p.379). The following section will review the different understandings of knowing, which affects the meaning of the teacher-student relationship.

Knowing from Epistemological Perspective

It is almost repetitive to put epistemology and knowing together from a modern point of view. The word “epistemology”—rooted in the Greek episteme, meaning “knowledge,” and λόγος, logos, meaning “logical discourse”—is the branch of philosophy concerned with the
theory of knowledge. Epistemological knowing, as I have discussed in Chapter One, is a consequence of the western Enlightenment. Based on the method of reasoning, it addresses questions such as: How do we know what we know? What makes justified beliefs justified? Whose knowledge has the most value? The epistemological knowing is how knowing has been commonly understood in modern schools. And the western understanding of the teacher-student relationship has traditionally been framed as an epistemological one. Levinas charges that the focus on the solitary individual is problematic because such philosophy sees the inability to totalize all events and experiences under one knowable system of rationality. Therefore, he asserts that an ethics that begins not in an ontology of knowing, but first in a philosophy of morals, is “a philosophy that begins with ethics and the responsibility to the other above all other commitments, and not with knowledge about how the world might be understood” (Procknow, 2011, p. 35). Levinas (1961/69) calls into question the scope and limit of the ontology of knowing in western philosophy. According to him, western philosophy is

a reduction of the other to the same by the interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being. …For the work of ontology consists in apprehending the individual (which alone exists) not in its individuality but in its generality (of which alone there is science). The ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, and its egoism. Philosophy is an egology. (p.43-44)

As Levinas points out, the fundamental concern of western philosophy is to make the other an object of knowledge, something to be understood. And the main way of totalizing the differences to sameness is through knowledge and knowing, especially in the context of modern schooling. Knowledge transmission under scientific disciplines is rooted in scientific management with the purpose of producing standardized products. Students are considered the objects to be filled and
disciplined. In this sense, the uniqueness of the individual is reduced to “sameness,” and alterity becomes comprehensible and controllable.

The current understanding of children usually constructs them as a group lacking knowledge, incapable of making intellectual or moral decisions, and needing education through disciplines. Meanwhile, schooling considers the acquisition of knowledge as the primary goal, which results in the privileging of a unitary subject. In other words, the subjectivity of the child is constructed as deficient, lacking, and incomplete. This deficient model is predicated on the assumption that someone knows, and someone does not know; thus, the goal of education is the transmission of knowledge from the one who knows, the teacher, to the one who does not know, the student. Therefore, education reinforces the dominant teacher/student hierarchy by privileging a metaphysical understanding of knowledge and knowing. Teacher-student relationships, from this epistemological standpoint, are constructed in the relationship of "knower" and "not knower."

Levinas also challenged humanism by critiquing western ontology. Humanism, which emerged during the Renaissance and experienced its “golden age” during the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, privileges the human subject as the prior source of knowledge. Levinas critiques western ontology due to its human-centered subjectivity: animals and other matter only have meaning as they pertain to human preservation or happiness.

In all, knowledge obtained from epistemological and ontological perspectives allows an appreciation of an external existence of knowledge, the linear order of knowing, and human subjectivity. This kind of knowledge undermines the uniqueness of the individual as well as the natural entanglement of humans with nature. However, if we disrupt this epistemological way of thinking, “not knowing” doesn’t necessarily mean “lack of” or “incapable of.” For example, a non-linear perspective of knowledge considers knowing as continually engaging with the world.
Therefore, knowledge is not pre-determined but ever-changing. This would imply that all the bits and pieces of the world somehow determine the knowledge that results from our engagement with them. This engagement, or relation with the other, results in knowledge as an indeterminate, ongoing process of becoming. In other words, it is an ethics, not an epistemology.

**Knowing from Ethical Perspective**

A Cartesian knowing is built on a given-ness of a distinction between subject and object. Ethical knowing doesn’t start with a set of given or fixed differences, but rather makes the inquires within phenomena in the ongoing intra-actions. The traditional western philosophy of knowing, as Levinas (1996) critiques, is to make the Other an object of knowledge, something to be understood. In this sense, the uniqueness of the individual is reduced to sameness. Using epistemological language, Levinas (1996) writes,

> Knowledge is a relation of the Same with the Other in which the Other is reduced to the Same and divested to its strangeness, in which thinking relates itself to the other, but the other is no longer other as such; the other is already appropriated, already mine. Henceforth, knowledge is without secrets or open to investigation, that is to say, it is a world. It is immanence. (p 151)

This reductive understanding of knowledge and knowing will change when we encounter, according to Levinas, the “face of the Other” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p. 50). The specific relation that Levinas describes in being in relation with another is the face-to-face relationship, in which the other is not understood into myself, but appeals to me to let him or her exist without the violence of consuming him or her. Egea-Kuehne (2008), who has written extensively on Levinas’s ethics in the area of education, writes,

> [It] is before the Other and the face of the Other that the individual can have the pure experience of the other. Levinas sees it as the same with ethics, inasmuch as one is aware that one is responsible for the other, that the existence of the other is more
Being face to face means always being receptive to the Other. The “face of the Other” makes us aware of the ethical side of ourselves since it is “non-phenomenal and non-conceptual” because, “while phenomena and concepts are, following Kant, always mine, the Other’s face is an ‘expression’ of something that is absolutely independent of me and has, therefore, a singular and non-categorizable character” (Truwant, 2014, p.699). Levinas’ ethical approach to knowing rejects “knowledgism” and proposes ethical thinking as an ultimate relation to reality. “Knowing is not a matter of mere differential responsiveness in the sense of simply having different responses to different stimuli. Knowing requires differential accountability to what matters and it is excluded from mattering” (Barad, 2007, p.380). An ethical perspective of knowing respects the irreducibility of alterity of the Other as well as matters of the universe.

Derrida, from the notion of ethical responsibility, also discussed the ethics of knowing. Derrida attempts to reveal the possibility of the impossible as a site of the ethicality of ethics from two aspects. Raffoul (2010) points out, “On one hand, ethical responsibility will be referred to an impossibility to the extent that one may conclude that responsibility itself is impossible” (p. 288), while on the other hand, “the very impossible will be presented as condition of possibility of responsibility” (p. 288). The impossible of the possibility shifts the western philosophical tradition from knowing to unknowing, or in other words, to a philosophy of ethics. About saying the event, Derrida (2007) writes,

Every time that saying the event exceeds this dimension of information, knowledge, and cognition, it enters the night—you spoke a great deal of the night—the ‘night’ of non-knowing, something that’s not merely ignorance, but that no longer pertains to the realm of knowledge. A non-knowing that is not lack, not sheer obscurantism, ignorance, or non-science, but simply something that is not of the same nature as knowing. (p.448)
Impossible is not simply “different from” or “the opposite of” possible; possible and impossible say the same thing under this situation. In all, knowing from an ethical perspective disrupts the obsession of knowing and humanism. An ethical knowing, i.e., unknowing, welcomes the Other, and opens itself to the unpredictable entanglement.

**Being: From Ontological Being to Ethical Being**

Being may be referred to as existence; being exists with the world from an ontological perspective (Heidegger, 1927/2008). Being can also be transformative, based on Laozi’s notion of being, or involved in an ethical relationship, as both Levinas and Laozi would agree.

**Heidegger and Ontological Being**

One fundamental insight of Heidegger’s philosophy is his observation that in the course of over 2,000 years of history, philosophy has attended to all the beings that can be found in the world (including the world itself), but has forgotten to ask what Being itself is. Heidegger begins his book *Being and Time* with a citation from Plato’s *Sophist* in order to query the meaning of Being, which, according to Heidegger, is lacking in western philosophy: “For manifestly you have been aware of what you mean when you use the expression ‘being.’ We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed” (Plato, 1993, p.244). Instead, Heidegger (1927/2008) proposes to understand being itself, as distinguished from any specific entities (beings); he states that Being is not something like *a* being. Being is what determines beings as beings—that regarding which beings are already understood. According to Heidegger, this sense of being precedes any notions of how or in what manner any particular being or beings exist; it is pre-conceptual, non-propositional, and pre-scientific. Accordingly, he calls this being *Dasein*, which in ordinary German means “being-there.”

Heidegger introduced the concept of *Dasein* from German to explain his notion of being. *Dasein* is not another name for consciousness, subject, or human beings, according to Heidegger
(1925/1992); it is the complex of defining relations and being of a genuine, lively life. Dasein is not something objectively present that then has the ability to do something, but “rather absorbed in dealing with the matters at hand concretely and practically” (p.30). Dasein shows its fundamental condition of being absorbed in the world and “its concern with the here and now” (Heidegger, 1945/2002, p.34). Heidegger (2010/1927) uses “phenomenon” and “logos” to describe the things with which we are being and points out that investigation should be through the phenomenological method. “The term ‘phenomenology’ expresses a maxim that can be formulated: ‘To the things themselves’! It is opposed to taking over concepts only seemingly demonstrated; and likewise, to pseudo-questions which often are spread abroad as ‘problems’ for generations” (p.26). This phenomenological concept of phenomenon, as self-showing, means the Being of beings—its meaning, modifications, and derivatives. Therefore, in Heidegger's view, fundamental ontology would be an explanation of the understanding preceding any other way of knowing, such as the use of logic, theory, specific ontology or reflective act. The best or only way to pursue being is to have a phenomenological sense without intentionality. To Heidegger, the world is never a stagnant object standing outside of us. This being-in-the-world is actually being-in-relation, “lingering with and letting oneself be affected” (Heidegger, 1992/1925, p. 159).

Moving beyond Husserl’s phenomenology of the science of consciousness and its object, which mainly follows the Cartesian tradition of rational analysis, Heidegger uses Dasein to describe the ontological being, which is against the ontic inquiry (“ontic inquiry” means the study of the being of existence, in contrast to ontological Being—author’s note) in positive sciences. It is in Heidegger’s ontological understanding of being that we find radically new conceptions of what being responsible means between teachers and students, such as the facticity of responsibility, the call of conscience and being-guilty, and the assumption of finitude. In short, we have an
“originary ethics” that is first and foremost a thinking of being and not a thinking of the subject in terms of the classical repertoire of concepts such as agency, will, and subjectivity (see Raffoul, 2010). In Heidegger we find, as Raffoul puts it, the “ethicality” of being itself, in which being is to be conceived not so much a substantial ground as an event that calls for responsible engagement and praxis. However, the flaw of Heidegger’s thoughts of being is obvious, too: when Heidegger discussed the existence of being, he did not include much about the ethical relationship to the Other. His main focus was on the being of the self.

**Taoism and Transformative Being**

“The traditional recognition of the individual self in the West seems to be the center of society; relationships are considered by-products of interacting individuals. Curriculum and educational practices are built around improving the minds of single individuals” (Hwu, 1998, in Pinar, 1998, pp.21-40). This western notion of self is partly based on the limited subject of “anthropological” thinking. In *The Anthropological Sleep* (1970), Foucault foresees the space opened by the “disappearance of man,” which can evoke new philosophical language. This new language is nothing negative, but rather, “the exact reversal of the movement which has sustained the wisdom of the west at least since the time of Socrates” (Foucault, 1977, p.43). It is this cessation of self that would make “perfect” wisdom possible and enable us to transgress the “dialectical man,” the western logic of contradictions and antagonism, as Foucault calls for “the disappearance of man” (Foucault, 1970). Likewise, according to Taoism, there is no “self” isolated from nature. To study the self is to forget the self, or in other words, to let the self be merged with nature. To examine this merger, we will turn to Taoism.

*Dao De Jing*, one of the original works of Taoism, describes the Dao as the source as well as the ideal of all existence: it is unseen but not transcendent, immensely powerful yet supremely humble, being the “root” of all things. The *Dao De Jing* intends to lead students to a
“return” to their natural state, in harmony with Dao (Ivanhoe & Van, 2005, p. 162). Taoism seeks to understand human relations as entangled with the relationship between human and nature because it believes in “the Body as the World” and “the World in the Body” (Kohn, 1993, pp. 174-175). To describe it in a different way, “energy with-in should go out; energy with-out should come in. When both kinds of energy are kept properly separate, the Tao of heaven is in its natural order” (Kohn, 1993, p.187). Therefore, there is no “Self” in Taoism. The Daoist attitude towards nature consists in emulating the three greater processes (earth, heaven, and Dao): the human being attaining the natural (zi ran / 自然), spontaneous self-unfolding, and thereby flourishing with the other myriad processes.

Appreciating the harmony between human and nature without emphasizing humans as the “center”, as in Taoism, could help us to rethink the traditional western concept of “self” from a non-human-centered perspective. Taoism also reveals a transformative relationship among the universe. Laozi states, “Thus something and nothing produce each other; the difficult and the easy complement each other; the long and the short off-set each other; the high and the low incline towards each other; note and sound harmonize with each other; before and after follow each other (Laozi, ch.2. Waley, Trans. 2009). In this statement, Laozi does not intend to emphasize the binary thinking of the universe; instead, he argues for a fluid transformative relationship in the always-already changing universe.

In all, the understanding of being based on Taoism has two distinctive features: first, being is not stable but always transformative; second, being has to be a harmony of human and nature.

Levinas and Ethical Being

Heidegger tries to conceive subjectivity as a function of being, of which expresses an “époque”: subjectivity as the ego presupposes Dasein. Such subjectivity belongs to essence as
the mode in which essence manifests itself. Levinas’ (1981) inquiry is concerned with the otherwise than being. He writes,

Otherwise than being catches sight, in the very hypostasis of a subject, its objectification, of an ex-ception, a null-site on the hither side of the negativity which is always speculatively recuperable, and outside of the absolute which can no longer be stated in terms of being. Not even in terms of entities, which one could suspect modulate being, and thus heal the break marked by the hypostasis. (p.17-18)

Levinas expanded Heidegger’s notion of being—the metaphysical ontology of being which focuses on ego-existence—to ethical being. For Levinas, the Other is unknowable and cannot be made into an object of the self, as the traditional metaphysical worldview believed.

*Is ontology fundamental?* Levinas (1991/1998) asked. To respond to his question, Levinas explored the rationality of the human psyche in the inter-subjective relation, in the relationship of one person to another, in the transcendence of the ‘for-the-other’ which initiates the ethical subject. Levinas described that relation is irreducible to comprehension. In other words, the alterity of the individual is irreducible. “The relation to the other is therefore not ontology” (Levinas, 1961/1969, p.7). For Levinas, even the Heideggerian ontology exceeding intellectualism is unable to describe this relation because the particular being is always-already understood within the horizon of Being. The claim here is that the relation with the other goes beyond comprehension, that it does not affect us in the concrete situation of speech. In speaking or listening to the other, the one does not reflect the other, but actively engages in a non-comprehensive, non-substantive relation to alterity, where the one focuses on the particular individual and forgoes the mediation of the universal. It is this “being in relation with the other”—variously described in the essay as "expression," "invocation," and "prayer"—that Levinas as understands as ethical.
What Levinas distinctively contributes to understanding Being can be described from two aspects: Firstly, Heidegger insightfully points out there is a move from ontic to ontological truth, which shifts the relation to Being above the relation to beings. Based on Heidegger’s thoughts, Levinas moves further from ontological truth to ethical relations of Being. Levinas highly respected Heidegger’s provocative thoughts as he states in his book *Totality and Infinity* (1969), “To assert the priority of being over beings means to make a pronouncement about the essence of philosophy, to make the relation to someone who is a being (the ethical relation) subordinate to the relation with the impersonal being of beings, which makes possible the grasping of, the domination over beings (the relation of knowing) and subjective justice to freedom” (Levinas, 1969). However, the limitations of Heidegger’s ontological worldviews are still there. According to Levinas, although Heidegger has given up the theoretical structure of western thought—the privilege of reason and representation—ontological truth continues to operate for Heidegger as the ultimate happening of reality. For Heidegger, being-with-the-world rests on the ontological relation. According to Levinas, replacing static and objective thinking with a dynamic and deeper understanding is unable to break through the categories of the self; being should be understood in an ethical relationship instead. “By relating to beings in the openness of being, understanding finds a meaning for them in terms of being. In this sense, understanding does not invoke them, but only names them. And thus, with regard to beings, understanding carries out an act of violence and of negation” (Levinas, 1998/1991, p.9). Here Levinas sets out from *being* in the verbal sense of the word, in which “being is suggested and understood, in a sense, as a process of being, an event of being, an adventure of being” (Levinas, 1998/1991, p.9). In other words, being is in the ongoing intra-action.

Secondly, Levinas’s account on “subjectivity” is to awake the singularity of the subject rather than offer a new conception of subjectivity. For the concept of "subjectivity," Biesta
(2003) explains that “the new ‘account’ of subjectivity should not be understood as a new conception of subjection. It should not be understood as an attempt to bring the ‘phenomenon’ of subjectivity under a concept” (Biesta, 2003, p.63). Levinas points out that the subject has no nature, or to be more precise, “it should be read as an attempt to express that the singularity or uniqueness of the subject cannot be conceived in ontological terms” (Biesta, 2003, p.63). Attempts to offer a new conception of subjectivity keeps philosophy trapped firmly inside the tradition of humanism. What Levinas attempts to do is awake the singularity of the subject, in other words, the alterity of the Other, which cannot be totalized or repeated. According to Levinas, the problem with ontology is that it can only think of the individual as a particular instance of something more general. But precisely in doing so, the subject’s uniqueness is obliterated (see Levinas, 1998, pp. 190-196). If, therefore, one wants to safeguard the uniqueness of the subject, one must do what is literally inconceivable, which is to go beyond essence to the mode that is “otherwise than being”. In all, being is not only about existence/beings, but ethics.

Levinas broadens the meaning of ontology, which goes beyond our rational understanding and the essence of existence. As is well known, Heidegger wrote nothing specifically devoted to the question of ethics. In his Letter on Humanism, ethics, or the demand to formulate an ethical theory, is specifically subordinate to the questions of being. For Heidegger, originary ethics is human dwelling thought upon the horizon of the truth of Being. However, Levinas argues that it is ethics, not ontology, that orients philosophy, and that ethical responsibility precedes reasoning. Ethics for Levinas means responsibility in relation to difference. He uses the metaphor of the “face to face” to discuss how the responsibility we have for the Other enters our lives. According to Levinas, ethics begins with the “face to face” interactions with another person. When a person is “face to face” with the other person, he/she should not focus on the appearance of the face, the skin, the color of eyeballs, the lips and so on.
Seeing that person is not seeing him or her as a reflection of one’s self, nor as a threat, but as different and greater than self.

The distinction between Heidegger and Levinas is that Levinas considers ethics as metaphysics; he tends to create a metaphysical opposition, which is opposed to ontology. However, this doesn’t mean Heidegger’s ethics is completely different or wrong. Poleshchuk (2010) discussed Heidegger’s ethics by referring to Nancy’s article on Heidegger’s “Originary Ethics”. Poleshchuk recognized that Dasein is the turning point in the thought of Heidegger’s ethics. He points out that the acting human does not point to a specific aspect of being, but as Nancy explains, it is its very Being itself, and thus it discloses an ethics as the thinking of being. In its conducting, Dasein brings into play the very meaning of Being (see Poleshchuk, 2010). Therefore, “the essential act of ethical action is thinking,” and as Nancy points out, “being a thinking of ethos as conduct according to the truth of Being, is more fundamental than ontology.” As Nancy specifies, “it does not think beings in their Being,” but “the truth of Being” (Nancy, 2002/1996, p.78). Nancy then unfolds what can be called the very ethicality of Being: the thinking of Being does not only involve an ethics, but it involves itself as an ethics (Nancy, 2002/1996, pp.78-79). Thus, we can justify the notion that the thought of being has an ethical dimension: “‘Original ethics’ is the more appropriate name for ‘fundamental ontology.’ Ethics properly is what is fundamental in fundamental ontology” (Nancy, 2002/1996, p.78).

Heidegger’s ontology of being fails in recognizing the strangeness of the individual; to move beyond, Levinas puts a widening and strengthening force on a very global meaning of totality. In other words, he embraces totality and infinity in the plural forms.

To further address the relationship between I and the Other, according to Levinas, I attend to myself in approaching the Other. This doesn’t mean that my existence is constituted in the thought of the others but that my existence is identified through the “intra-actions” (Barad, 2007).
with the Other. For example, when people ask the question, “Who is it?” the inquiry, in fact, is not a question and is not satisfied by a knowing. He to whom the question is put has already presented himself, without being a content. He has presented himself as a face without intentionality. The face is not a modality of quiddity or an answer to a question, but the correlative of what is prior to every question. For Levinas, the orientation to the Other’s unknowability is more important than knowing; ethics goes beyond knowing.

One of the crucial and most intriguing dimensions of Levinas’ thought lies in the fact that this new ‘account’ of subjectivity should not be understood as a new conception of subjectivity. What Levinas is doing should not be read as an attempt to outline the nature of human subjectivity, but as an attempt to express that the subject has no essence. Levinas (1981) writes, “Humanity, subjectivity—the excluded middle, excluded from everywhere, null-site—signify the breakup of this alternative, the one-in-the-place-of-another, substitution, signification in its signifyingness qua sign, prior to essence, before identity” (p.14). Levinas’ attempt to express that uniqueness of the subject cannot be conceived in ontological terms. The problem with ontology, according to Levinas, is that it can only think of the individual as a particular instance of something more general. But precisely in doing so, the subject’s uniqueness is obliterated (See Levinas, 1998, pp. 190-196). The phenomenon of being absent from one’s own manifestation is not simply designate a relativity of knowledge, but “a mode of being where nothing is ultimate, where everything is a sign, a present assenting itself from its presence, and in this sense, a dream” (Levinas, 1969, p.178). Rather than offering an answer to subjectivity, Levinas urges us into the process of questioning: questioning the questions and the answers. As he argues, “The more important question is not to be found at the level of content (the ‘what,’ the ‘said’), but at the level of performance (the ‘how,’ the ‘saying’)” (Biesta, 2003, p. 64). Ethics is not aiming to figure out the answers or rules because, when you know it, you take on actions; when you don’t know, ethics emerges.
Given the shift of considering knowing as epistemology to ethics, and the shift from ontological being to the entanglement of ethico-onto-epistemological being, the meaning of children needs to be re-conceptualized in education. How could the ethics of the Other impact our understanding of children? Informed by the ethical relationship to the Other, how might the teacher-student relationship be reimagined? Building on the ethico-onto-epistemological view I have discussed in previous sections, I will explore new possibilities of understanding children.

**Child: From Modern Child to “Becoming-child”**

Laozi, in appreciating the wisdom of ethics, believes that children are not far from the original De (ethics) (“De” as the “De” in “Dao De Jing”) because they have not yet been occupied by much knowledge and desire. The children’s simplicity and innocence are characteristics that every human should, if possible, retain. As Laozi points out, “Not to part from the invariable De is to return to the stable of infancy” (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 28). The life of the child is closer to the ideal life (the ethics, wisdom). Laozi’s view on the simplicity and innocence of the child indicate his opinion on ethics and knowledge. “Banish wisdom, discard knowledge.” (*Dao De Jing*, ch.19). In this notion, Laozi is not against knowing; he is against mechanical acquisition of knowledge. For him, knowing is not separable from ethics (De); knowing should be embodied in Tao, which is the wisdom of existential being and philosophical being. In contrast, western concepts of knowledge and reasoning in modern society separate us from being and ethics. In the western tradition, nearly every hegemonic account of the genesis of the child is adultomorphic—interpreting children’s behaviors and thoughts in adults’ terms. The child is negatively understood as “incomplete,” “innocent,” and “immature.” Therefore, the child has to be educated, to learn all the “what” and “how” in order to prepare for the adult life. “The ‘child’ is a taken-for-granted subject central to the structure of the educational field. While much educational work flows around assumptions about children and their development, what is meant
by being a ‘child’ is not debated” (Baker, 1998, p.118). What does “child” mean? Are there essential differences between child and adult? This section will rethink the meaning of child from a Deleuzian perspective. Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of “fold,” “non-linear time,” “body without organs,” and “becoming” will be explored in deterritorializing the concept of modern child. The modern concept of child has been shaped/defined by cognitive theory, which is based on a linear time structure and a predictable knowledge system. The concept of fold offers an escape from such fixed structure through the ongoing process of becoming. Becoming, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), has no beginning or end—it grows from the middle, with neither directions nor destinations. I now turn to each concept separately to discuss how they might shift our understanding of children.

**Fold**

Deleuze’s (1991, 1993) notion of fold offers an escape from the trapped, chained or dead subject, which has challenged the modern understanding of human subjectivity. According to him, there is no one substance, only an always-differentiating process, an origami cosmos, always folding, unfolding, refolding. “The infinite fold separates, or passes, between matter and the soul. … but in differentiating itself [the infinite fold], swarms over both sides: the fold differentiates itself into folds” (Deleuze, 1991, pp.242-243). The fold, without beginning or ending, produces both subjects and objects such that the two can no longer be thought of as apart. Thus, it is more productive to think of objects-subjects, the hyphen denoting the infinite folding. Such a theoretical framework largely releases the space to look at child/childhood from the nomadic spectrum. So to speak, the growth of the child is always folding, unfolding, and refolding, it is an event. Event is a concept that works against the notion of representation and prediction. According to Deleuze (1994), an event happens from behind, from above, it is not foreseeable.
The event is not the state of affairs. It is actualized in a state of affairs, in a body, in a lived [experience], but it has a shadowy secret part that is continually subtracted from or added to its actualization: in contrast with the state of affairs, it neither begins nor ends but has gained or kept the infinite movement to which it gives consistency. (p.156)

Folding, unfolding, and refolding are all eventful. The event is an ongoing, infinite movement, like the child. The growth of the child has no destination, no progressive path; it is an always eventful differentiating process.

About the meaning of event, Derrida further explains by distinguishing it from acknowledgment. He points out that there are at least two ways of saying the event. One is saying what it is, saying what happens, which is a saying that is close to knowledge and information; and there is another saying that “does in saying, a saying that does, that enacts” (Derrida, 2007, p. 445. emphasis in original). The latter is what Derrida means of the event—that saying does not say the event, but makes the event, constitutes the event. He specifically explains why the event is beyond knowledge/reason from two aspects. First, saying what it is (saying things as they present, historical events as they take place, etc.) is “a statement of knowledge or information, a sort of cognitive saying of description” (Derrida, 2007, p.446). This saying of the event always comes after the event, so it never actually says the event. Second, saying the event, and hence the structure of language, according to Derrida (2005) “is bound to a measure of generality, iterability, and repeatability, it always misses the singularity of the event” (p.446). However, the event itself is absolutely singular; it is neither foreseeable nor repeatable. It is at this point that Derrida says an event is only possible as impossible. And “when the impossible makes itself possible, the event takes place (possibility of the impossible)” (Derrida, 2005, p.90. emphasis in original). Based on both Deleuze’s and Derrida’s notions of event, I argue that it is impossible to determine what the child should do in order to be prepared for the adult life
because: first, the future is not foreseeable. We cannot envision the future based on past and present as modern philosophy normally does; second, the child is always already becoming; it doesn’t fit in any predetermined pathway.

**Non-linear Time**

Time is another important concept that needs to be re-examined behind the concept of modern child. Time, more specifically, age, is one key dimension in defining the child besides biological development. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines the child as “a human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier.” This is ratified by 192 of 194 member-countries. Time in the discourse of the modern child is the linear time that we usually define. However, time understood in a non-linear way will be distinctively different according to Deleuze. This section will explore the non-linear concept of time by drawing on Deleuze’s philosophy of time.

Deleuze formulates a non-chronological concept of time as a multi-dimensional and non-metrical manifold (or multiplicity). There are two basic concepts in Deleuze’s philosophy of time. The first is the concept of multiplicity. Multiplicity replaces the old metaphysical concept of substance. As the pure change, multiplicity is characterized by its infinite variability or chaos: “Chaos is characterized less by the absence of determination than by the infinite speed with which they take shape and vanish” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996, p.42). In other words, chaos is more related to spacing, which indicates that multiplicity is a verb in an entangled ongoing process. The second is the concept of synthesis. Deleuze proposed three fundamental types of temporal syntheses in his philosophy of time: habit (present), memory (past), and the new (future). And one of the distinctive features of Deleuze’s philosophy of time is to embrace paradoxes for their productive power, where Deleuze followed Bergerson’s set of paradoxes. The three paradoxes which are relevant to the present, past, and future as Deleuze identifies are: 1)
Paradox of contemporaneity: “The past must be contemporaneous with the present that it was”; 2) Paradox of coexistence: “all the past must coexist with the new present in relation to which it is past”; and 3) Paradox of pre-existence: “the pure element of the past pre-exists the passing present” (James, 2011, p.63). In other words, since the past adds nothing to the present that passes into it, it must be contemporaneous with the present. Since the past must be contemporaneous with each passing present, all the past is contemporaneous with each passing present. The past is contemporaneous with all time and pre-exists any passing present. Time travel, as it usually shows in science fiction, has been understood based on a linear progression from past, present to the future.

Can we know the present moment as it is? The problem with knowing the present is that the very concept of knowledge implies knowledge of a moment/world that is already in the past (or is at least in the process of passing). “We can never have a knowledge of the world (even the present world of lived experience) because, in an emergent universe, we would constantly have to reassess our knowledge of the present in the very moment we acquire it” (Osberg & Biesta, 2007, p. 43. emphasis in original). Knowledge, in other words, is not conservative but radically inventionist. Therefore, when we think about schooling, we should not think of it as primarily providing children with knowledge of an already determined world. Osberg and Biesta write:

We need to bear in mind that the world we are teaching about has always already passed and so any attempt to transmit the rules of this world (which in an emergent universe are no longer appropriate for the present) might be considered pedagogically irresponsible. (p.46-47 original emphasis)

By disrupting the linear relation from past, present to the future, Deleuze argues that “we are traveling back and forward in time all the time with no need for special machines or odd physical properties such as wormholes” (James, 2011, p.8). Deleuze’s philosophy of time deterritorialized
the concept of childhood, which believes childhood is the stage before adulthood. Childhood based on a non-chronological concept of time is multiplicities, is becoming.

**Body without Organs**

The Body without Organs (BwO) is proposed as a means of escaping what Deleuze and Guattari perceive as the shortcomings of traditional (Freudian, Lacanian) psychoanalysis. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari (1983) explain the BwO image by comparing its real potentials to the eggs: “The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by gradients marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors” (p. 19). For Deleuze and Guattari, every actual body has a limited set of traits, habits, movements, affects, and such; moreover, every actual body also has a virtual dimension: a vast reservoir of potential traits, connections, affects, and movements. This collection of potentials is what Deleuze and Guattari call the BwO. “The BwO is permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 40). Rather than proceeding directly to invert or deconstruct terms dominant in the production of identity and consciousness, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that implicit within, between, and all around these are other—possibly more effective—fields of immanence and states of being. Hence, the BwO envisions the actual body without organs as an infinite horizon, rather than a transcendent goal.

Further, for Message (2005):

The BwO does not exist in opposition to the organism notions of subjectivity, and it is never completely free of the stratified exigencies of proper language, the State, family, or other institutions. However, it is, despite this, both everywhere and nowhere, disparate and homogeneous. (p. 37)

Although BwO is a process that is directed toward a course of continual becoming, it cannot break away entirely from the system that it desires to escape. Two points need to be addressed
here: Firstly, BwO indicates a continual becoming process without any teleological completion. Secondly, the becoming process happens within the system from which it aims to subvert/escape.

Rethinking childhood with the concept of BwO, childhood is neither a specific stage, which has been characterized by certain age period, nor a certain developmental level towards adulthood. As Foucault (1988) argues, the decentering of the subject, then, is to focus on systems of ideas as historical practices through which the objects of the world are constructed and become systems of action. The approach of decentering the subject enables us to problematize how the singular child is constituted by focusing on the childhood blocks instead of children.

**Becoming-child**

Deleuze’s notion of “becoming-child” is based on his concepts of “fold,” “time,” and “BwO,” but not limited to them. All these concepts are intertwined together as an assemblage; therefore, there is no way to understand one concept without the others. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree” (p.239). Becoming is a verb; however, it is not imitating, or identifying, or producing, or establishing, as Deleuze argues. It is a verb “with a consistency all its own” (1987, p.239). It is under this notion of “becoming” that Deleuze created the concept of “Becoming-child.” On one hand, becoming-child indicates the non-teleological trajectory of a child’s growth. It is not towards adulthood, not towards a certain developmental stage; it is just the becoming in its consistency with itself. On the other hand, becoming-child occurs through blocks, it is a process of becoming collective. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write,

> The child, like the Dragon twin who takes a piece of the placenta with him, tears from the organic form of that Mother and intense and destratified matter that on the contrary constitutes his or her perpetual break with the past, his or her present experience, experimentation. The BwO is a childhood block, a becoming, the opposite of a childhood memory. It is not the child ‘before’ the adult, or the mother ‘before’ the child: it is the strict contemporaneousness of the adult, of the adult and the child, their map of comparative densities and intensities, and all of the variations on that map. (p. 164)
Here, the childhood blocks provide tools for thinking about subjectivity as collective, similar to the assemblage. All childhood becoming happens in “blocks”: “The line-system (or block-system) of becoming is opposed to the point-system of memory” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p.324). The childhood blocks, or becoming-child, challenges the theories of modern child in several ways:

First, the childhood blocks radically deterritorialize the modern age-specific ideas of “the child.” Rather than a chronological bracket or developmental stage, becoming-child is a set of effects and capacities to be affected, which can be activated at any stage of life. Therefore, childhood is not a state that can be plotted on a teleological trajectory. Adult, apparently, is not the destination or goal of the becoming of child.

Second, becoming-child also deterritorializes the psychological subject of the singular child. “Childhood blocks offers a collective model of child as a multiple subject that is radically different from understandings of the psychological nature of the state of childhood” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.282). Developmental psychology, which has become the expert discipline in institutionally asserting what Deleuze’s calls “ways of existing” (Peters, 1998, p.8) should be shaken under the notion of childhood blocks. Using Deleuze & Guattari’s (1987) concept, the child is the “rhizome,” which “is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. … it has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills” (p.21). Reconceptualizing children’s becoming within educational contexts interrupts the taken-for-granted notions of “childhood,” “development,” and “grown up,” as developmental theorists of child would have us believe.

The concept of becoming-child doesn’t only refer to the child; it includes all humans, as well as animals and others. From this sense, childhood blocks also bring adult/child relations into
all becomings. The child and adult live side by side, in contemporaneousness. The contemporaneousness between child and adult disrupts the relationships between age and childhood effects. “The affectivity of childhood is a state that anyone, regardless of age, can embody” (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p.283). Deleuze and Guattari not only talk about becoming-child, but also about “becoming-woman,” “becoming-animal,” etc. However, in _A Thousand Plateaus_, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) state that these childhood blocks serve as a primary vehicle for becoming:

One may contrast a childhood block, or a becoming-child, with the childhood memory: ‘a’ molecular child is produced … ‘a’ child coexist with us, in a zone of proximity or a block of becoming, on a line of deterritorialization that carries us both off – as opposed to the child as we once were, whom we remember or phantasize, the molar child whose future is adult. (p. 324)

Childhood blocks are collective subjectivities that zigzag across time. For Hickey-Moody (2013),

All becomings are, then, traversed by becoming-child, an iteration of the affective register and a wonder at and of worldly surrounds: a new awareness. Like a refrain itself, a processual assemblage of becoming child-woman-animal-bird feature in ‘Of the refrain.’ It is folded into the plateau on a number of occasions. (p. 282)

In all, “becoming-child” yields a more open, even playful relationship to studying and engaging in understanding child/childhood. With Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is not a transcendental, linear process between two items/points. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) offer this:

A line of becoming is not defined by points it connects… on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle… The line or block of becoming that unities the wasp and the orchid produces a shared deterritorialization: of the wasp, in that it becomes a liberated piece of the orchid’s reproductive system, but also of the orchid, in that it becomes the object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction. (p.293)
Becoming operates on a nonlinear, Bergsonian time (non)scale, and is hence nondevelopmental, nonevolutionary. “The becoming is the something else, the newness that is created. Becoming is the movement through a unique event that produces experimentation and change” (Jackson, 2010, p. 581). There is no origin, no destination, no end point, or goal. So to speak, “becoming produces nothing other than itself” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.238). When we speak of “becoming-child,” we are not talking about becoming like a child, resembling a child or engaging in childishness, but between these points, the multiplicities.

In all, the re-imagination of the student argues that childhood is not the period of the preparation for adulthood. Instead, the growing of the child is always in the folding process of becoming; not in the process of becoming adult, but at the strict contemporaneousness of the adult and child. In other words, child is always on the journey of becoming child.

**Teacher-Student Relationship: An Ethico-onto-epistemological Entanglement**

I would like to revisit Biesta’s (2010) question regarding the notion of teacher-student relationship. “How should we call those who are the subjects of education?” (p. 540) he asked. How we call those we teach indicates our relations, and “the science of education can only begin with a description of the educator in his relation to the one being educated” (Biesta, 2012, p. 1). So, how might we understand teacher-student relationship differently? Barad (2007) argues, “We are not outside observers of the world. Neither are we simply located at particular places in the world; rather we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity” (p.184). How we think about the world and how we live in it are intertwined. The ontology, epistemology, ethics, as well as the practical engagement are woven together. How we understand teacher-student relationship has to be entangled with our view of the child, our notion of knowing and being, as well as teaching and learning.

The western obsession with knowing, often without listening to the Other, prevents
the possibilities opened by unknowing. However, questioning the philosophical foundations which have occupied education since the Enlightenment may urge us to rethink teaching and learning, as well as the teacher-student relationship. Based on the discussion of different understandings of knowing, being, and child, I have argued that: 1) ethical knowing is unknowing; 2) ethical being reveals that being is always-already in the ongoing intra-active relations; 3) the destination of child is neither child nor anyone else. Inspired by both Deleuze and Levinas with the concepts like “responsibility before freedom,” “multiplicities,” and “Other,” Aoki inserts, “We can sense here, a different tone of ‘self/other’ relationship in a language breaking with the subject-object dualism. This is the kind of ethical consideration that seems to be possible in the curricular landscape of multiplicity” (in Pinar, 2005, p.45). The teacher-student relationship is, therefore, an ethico-onto-epistemological entanglement. Specifically, teacher-student relationship is an ongoing intra-active relationship; teachers and student should not be defined by knowing, but unknowing. Chapter four will discuss the pedagogy of unknowing.

Concluding Thoughts: From Rationality to Relationality

This chapter traces four essential concepts in rethinking the teacher-student relationship: knowing, being, ethics, and children. And the major theoretical shift of understanding teacher-student relationship from episteme to ethics is the shift from rationality to relations. Rationality based on the beliefs of measurement and repetition created so many boundaries in education. The danger of doing so is, boundaries are meant to keep others (other ideas, other understanding, other ways of actions) out. We can, as Wittgenstein (1968) puts it, “draw a boundary around…the mathematics curriculum (and it is, on occasion, completely appropriate to do so), but we cannot give it a boundary that could prevent it from intertwining with our lives and the life of the Earth” (p.142). This chapter explained why we should shift our understanding of
knowing and being from rationality to an ethical perspective. “The technological-scientific world is in no way an artificial one, nor is it a natural one; it is rather the consequential configuration of the metaphysical representation of the world” (Heidegger, 1995/2010b, p. 126). Re-thinking the modern rational concept of knowing as an entanglement of knowing, being and ethics doesn’t mean we depreciate the value of knowing; rather, “we adhere to a fundamental break in a privileging of the discursive and a thinking of knowledge as the sole domain of epistemology” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 119). Education, teacher-student relationship is first and foremost, relational and ethical. Several philosophers and concepts are woven into this chapter in reflecting on the problematic rational approach of teaching, and the significance of ethics in teacher-student relationship. The reason I didn’t specifically discuss each philosopher separately, but instead clustered the concepts, is because each concept is like a melody. The reconfiguring of melodies, creating new sounds of dissonance and difference out of juxtapositions, and an isolated linear structure would have silenced this melody. Thus, it is relationality which serves as the key for us to understand education, understand teaching and learning, and understand the ethics of teacher-student relationship. Relationality, in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, is multiplicity, is a verb in this dissertation.
CHAPTER FOUR
A PEDAGOGY OF UNKNOWING

One gains knowledge through knowing, approaches wisdom through unknowing.

daoism and many other Chinese philosophical and cultural traditions (i.e., Chinese Buddhism) distinguish wisdom from knowing the nature of civilization. Knowledge is a noun that refers to the facts and information accumulated; it relates to the hard facts and data that can be available to anyone if he/she has the right resources and method. Wisdom, on the other hand, is a verb, that refers to the ongoing becoming process. “Knowledge is a process of piling up facts, and wisdom lies in their simplification” (Fischer, 1945, p.309). Wisdom, for Laozi, is the Dao. As he states, “In pursuit of knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom (Dao), subtract” (Laozi, Dao De Jing, Ch. 48). The western obsession with knowing and the self prevents the possibilities opened by unknowing. Unknowing, which opens the space beyond humanism and rationality is an insightful approach in rethinking pedagogical practices in schools that this chapter engages. I turn to Laozi’s philosophy of “Wu-Wei”, particularly the concepts of “nothingness” and “naturalness,” in this chapter to enrich the meaning of unknowing and its relation to pedagogical practice.

Daoist philosophy, which emerged in the Spring and Autumn period (BC 770—BC476/BC403) of China, has a most profound influence in Chinese philosophy. “Laozi,” as scholars use for the author of Dao De Jing, is actually not his real name. The name “Laozi” is best taken to mean “Old (lao) Master(zi).” I still use Laozi in this dissertation as the name of the author for clarification convenience. Laozi’s influence on Chinese culture is pervasive. He has been regarded as the founder of Daoism, which appears as both a school of philosophy (daojia) and a religious tradition (daojia). In this study, I focus on Daoism as a school of philosophy. Daoism serves as the central ideal for all of the early mainstream Chinese thinkers, including Confucius, Mencius, Xun Zi and others. And it eventually became one of the central themes of
east Asian religious thought—particularly in Chan (Zen) Buddhism and neo-Confucianism. For example, the notion of "non-self" (wu wo, 无我), ”no desire” (wu yu 无欲) and stillness (jing 静) are all rooted in Daoist philosophy. Daoist philosophy also greatly influenced Chinese statecraft and Chinese medicine. This chapter particularly focuses on the Daoist “wu-wei” (written as “无为” in simplified Chinese and “無為” in traditional Chinese) philosophy in the text of *Dao De Jing* in exploring a different way of thinking about knowledge and its relation to education.

P. J. Thiel describes the Chinese model of knowledge as a sort of “experience of Being”: “it is very noteworthy that we [in the west] lack a specific expression for this type of knowledge…. this type of experience of Being [Seins-Erfahrung] is not irrational, but is rather a deeper, entities-bound [Wesensgebundene] type of knowledge—one that is experienced with the entire spiritual personhood” (1968, p.85). According to this experience of being, neither the body and mind nor the thinking and experiencing process can be separated from each other. Wu Kuang-ming speaks of the Daoist ideal (Zhuangzi in particular) as a form of “body-thinking” (1992). However, several scholars have suggested that the Daoist form of engaged knowledge is a kind of “skill-knowledge” (Fingarette, 1972; Hansen 1975; Hansen, 1983a; Hansen, 1983b; Eno 1990; Ivanhoe, 1993). That is, they propose that the early Chinese conception of knowledge should be seen as the principles in guiding practice. Although the skill model is not entirely apt in the Chinese context, it serves as a helpful illustration of how the Daoist understanding of knowledge differs significantly from that most dominant analytic western thought.

"Wu-wei," literally meaning non-action or non-doing, is most often associated with Laozi, and it plays a greater role in *Dao De Jing* than any other later texts in Chinese philosophy. The “wu” in “wu-wei” has a much richer meaning in its metaphorical structure than its literal meaning. In realism, wu means “not exist,” “non,” or “empty”; and “wei” usually means
“doing”, “acting”, “taking on actions”, etc. Many misunderstandings of “wu” in wu-wei, which come from its literal meaning, point to the state of passivity in dealing with human activities. However, wu-wei, for Laozi, represents an ideal state of harmony with the human and cosmos. Wei—the action—is rooted in wu, which represents the nothingness and naturalness; and wu, the “non,” is where the action emerges, which is the “not yet,” the possibility of everything. I will further explain the philosophy of wu-wei through two core concepts in Dao De Jing, one is the “nothingness,” the other is the “naturalness.”

**Nothingness**

“Wu is nothingness, emptiness,” says Laozi (*Dao De Jing*, ch.11). Nothingness does not mean “non-existence”; rather, it reveals that the matter and the energy of the universe doesn’t exist isolative. There are three key concepts here in interpreting the meaning of “Wu”: complementary relation, infinite transformation, and indeterminacy.

In the famous Yin/Yang symbol of Daoism, as I briefly mentioned in Chapter One (Figure 1), we can see one dark and one light fish, which represents the two opposite forces—Yin and Yang—entangled in a complementary relation. While the Yin and Yang represent several things, such as the moon and the sun, female and male, dark and light, it generally represents the negative and positive energy in a transformative relation. Instead of a clear boundary between the Yin and Yang, part of the dark is in the light, and the light cannot be separated from the dark; they give rise to each other as they relate to one another. Although duality is found in many belief systems, Yin and Yang are parts of a Oneness that is also equated with the Dao. Such a complementary, transformative relationship in the Oneness is one of the most important notions in understanding Laozi. Laozi describes the complementary relation of the universe through normal phenomena:

Thirty spokes of a wheel all join at a common hub yet only the hole at the center
The notion that the universe exists in a complementary, yet ever-changing relation is important in Laozi's philosophy, which he discusses in several chapters of *Dao De Jing*. According to Laozi, this complementary and transformative relationship reveals the always already existed connections of the universe and the non-stable way of living. Laozi uses several examples to show the complementary relationships of the universe, such as high and low, bend and straight, hollow and filled, loss and gain. However, the complementary and transformative relationships Laozi talks about are completely different from dualism or Cartesian dualism, as I have discussed throughout Chapter One and Three. The dualistic dichotomy is a way of splitting a whole into two opposite parts in order to know it, which is a dominant approach in western education since the Enlightenment. While the concept of dualism created the boundaries and the impermeable relationship between subject and object based on reasoning, the philosophy of Laozi reveals the holistic, transformative relations of the universe.

Barad is attuned to the complementary, transformative relations in “Wu” (nothingness). She writes, “Complementarity. Contingency. Indeterminacy. Inseparability. Any attempt to say something, anything, even about nothing, and we find ourselves always already immersed in the play of quantum in/determinacy” (Barad, 2012b, p.7). Barad further explains, “In-determinacy is not the state of a thing, but an unending dynamism. The play of in/determinacy accounts for the un/doings of no/thingness” (p.8). What is going to happen is unpredictable because all matters
entangle with each other in a complementary, contingent way—it does not follow linear or logical consequences as predicted through reasoning. The universe is just a dynamic entanglement full of (im)possibilities. “Nothingness” is not absence, but the “infinite plenitude of openness,” as Barad (p.16) points out. The infinite plenitude of openness echoes the transformative life in “Wu” about which Laozi writes.

Indeterminacy is another concept embodied in the nothingness of Wu. A deterministic system is a metaphysical conceptual model of the philosophical doctrine of determinism applied to a system for understanding that everything that has and will occur in the system is based on the physical outcomes of causality. The causality theory holds on to the notion that every action produces a reaction, every effect has a cause. Completely different from determinism, the nothingness of wu is rooted in a university of chaos, where no single causal relationship could be identified from the others. In relation to the transformative relationship of the universe as I have discussed, indeterminacy confirms that the way of the Dao cannot be known or categorized.

Warning the danger of human will, Laozi points out,

The wish to grasp the world and control it—I see its futility. The world is a spiritlike vessel; it cannot be controlled. One who would control it would ruin it; one who would grasp it would lose it.

Thus, things may lead or follow, blow hot or cold, be strong or weak, sustain or destroy. Therefore, the sage discards the excessive, the extravagant, the overbearing.
(Dao De Jing, ch.29. Robert Eno, Trans., 2010)

The excessive, overbearing actions, as Laozi points out, are humans’ desire to conquer nature, control the world, or grasp what they want. Those are all against the indeterminate nature of the universe.
Informed by the notion of indeterminacy, I would like to briefly reflect on the current educational practices. Students are always expected to be better: the more, the better; the faster, the better; the higher, the better. However, how about less? Slower? Lower? Or some other options? More specifically, “better” performance in school directly relates to more knowledge, higher scores, more advanced courses, and so on, which can never be achieved in the competition. Consequently, the subject/object dichotomy has been reinforced through the pursuit of knowledge. Laozi writes, “In pursuit of knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom (Dao), subtract” (Dao De Jing, ch.48). There is no way to fulfill the human’s desire in the pursuit of knowledge; it is in the simplified Dao of wisdom that the human can find the peace and harmony in the world. Here, Laozi distinguishes wisdom from knowledge. While knowledge comes through epistemological knowing, wisdom concerns the ethics of knowing and being. For the wisdom of knowing, instead of asking how to get more and how to be faster, we ponder: is “more,” better? The faster, the better? Probably not always; as Laozi describes, “Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished” (DaoDeJing, ch.46). “Unlike universalized or merely habitual forms of ‘flexibility of response and action’ (Slingerland, 2003, p.8), the wu-wei philosophy opens up the ways of open-ended, complicated, and flexible practices by challenging imposed, fixed, and binary modes of thinking” (Fleming, 1998).

Transformative relationship is the third key concept in the nothingness of wu. The philosophy of wu-wei reveals that the universe works harmoniously according to its own Way. The will of human beings has to be in accordance with the nature. A philosophical wu-wei embraces non-action in human activities; however, non-action does not mean actionless, but acting in harmony with nature. According to Huai Nan Zi, “By wuwei, one seeks to come into
harmony with the great Dao, which itself accomplishes by nonaction.” 6 Non-action, in this sense, means acting with the guidance of the great Dao. The great Dao is completely different from the normal meaning of guides/rules; it is not predictable and cannot be represented in language. Therefore, human actions cannot be predetermined except in a harmonious relationship with the universe. Considering Dao as the way of the universe, Laozi criticizes the desire to privilege certain knowledges or truths, in other words, authority.

The notion of “wu” as in wu-wei means nothingness; it is an orientation of openness towards the world. To further explain this concept, wu in wu-wei is the impossibility of possibilities, a concept with which Derrida would agree. Derrida attempts to reveal the possibility of the impossible as a site of the ethicality of ethics from two aspects. As Raffoul (2010) points out, “on the one hand, ethical responsibility will be referred to as impossible to the extent that one may conclude that responsibility itself is impossible” (p. 288); on the other hand, “the very impossible will be presented as condition of possibility of responsibility” (p. 288). The impossibility of the possible shifts the western philosophical tradition from knowing to unknowing.

Naturalness

The notion of nothingness usually comes with “naturalness” (ziran, written as “自然” in Chinese) in wu-wei. The meaning of naturalness is revealed in the two separate parts of the phrase “zi ran,” along with the meaning of ziran as one word. “Zi” (自) as a character not only refers to the self but also indicates the consequence of being self—freedom and joy. “Ran” (然) means “as it is”, “as itself reveals.” The two characters together—“ziran”—as a word means nature in Chinese; however, for Laozi, ziran refers more to the Way of Being rather than the

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6 The original quote was written in Chinese as "无为为之合于道" from Huai Nan Zi (《淮南子·原道训》).
nature itself. And the self, the natural way of being self, is always already involved in a relation of being-with-the-world. As Laozi sates, “Human should follow the law of the earth; the earth follows the trail of heaven; the heaven follows the trail of Dao; the law of the Dao is its being as how it is” (Dao De Jing, ch. 25). And the ideal way of being is an unself-consciousness of being.

**Unself-consciousness**

Wu-wei represents a whole set of families of conceptual metaphors that convey a sense of effortlessness and unself-consciousness. Unself-consciousness, or “forgetting” (wang 忘) the self is one major difference between Laozi and western rationality. The notion of unself-consciousness comes through the whole text of Dao De Jing, as Laozi barely talks about desire or subjectivity, which centers on self-consciousness. He believes it is the Dao that is always in its complementary, transformative relationship. For example, in the Yin-Yang symbol, no individual self exists; it is the relationship, the oneness, the boundlessness that is the core idea of Daoism. Unself-consciousness is often conveyed through the metaphor of object-loss: forgetting/losing the self, minimizing the self, etc. However, as Slingerland asserts, unself-consciousness should be conceived metaphorically by means of the container-self structure. Such structure considers the self as a container, and “it is only when it is emptied of everything extraneous that spiritual perfection is attained” (Slingerland, 2003, p.104). This figurative “emptying” of the container of the self can be found in Chapter 48:

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In pursuit of knowledge, add things every day.
To attain wisdom (Dao), subtract.
To control the world, undertake nothing.
When he is free of doing, he is free of control.
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Rather than “asking for more,” as is popularized in modern western culture, the philosophy of wu-wei turns to unself-consciousness through subtraction. A person obsessed with adding on
things every day can hardly be satisfied. It is when he/she reduces his/her self-consciousness that the self finds its freedom of non-action.

In addition, the process of subtraction cannot be done intentionally; it has to be unconscious. This reveals one paradox of wu-wei. David Nivison (1997) explores this tension that he refers to as the “paradox of virtue” in life. According to him, the paradox of virtue can only be acquired by someone who is not consciously trying to acquire it—that is, performing a virtuous act while at the same time being self-conscious of its virtuousness makes it, paradoxically, not fully virtuous.

The Law of Reversal

Nowadays, it seems that everyone is busy catching up with various deadlines, but we barely stay ahead of the “deadlines.” We always feel as though we are “falling behind.” The feeling of falling behind or “procrastination” makes us anxious. Although human beings created the concept of time, sadly we have been racing against it ever since. Could we just go back to nature and savor the moment?

This question leads to another important system of metaphors related to naturalness: reversion, which centers on the image of the “root”. Reversion, as described in *Dao De Jing*, is not the process of strengthening, but a law of return from something to nothing, to the root. As shown in Chapter Six, the root is what links everything, it is the multiplicity of its noun and verb meanings.

The spirit of the valley does not die;
This is called the mysterious female.
The gate of the mysterious female
Is called the root of the Heaven and Earth.
Like a fine, unbroken thread it seems to exist!
Draw upon it and it never be exhausted.
(Rump, Trans., 1979)
Both the mysterious female and the root are the origins of things, and both are described as enduring eternally – like the rhizome, it is never going to die. Rhizome is a concept from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), meaning “alliance, uniquely alliance” (p.25), an “acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system” (p.21) in its always becoming. The Daoist “root” is growing in such a rhizomatic way, growing from the inside. It is neither a linear nor a genealogical structure of lines. In other words, the Daoist law of reversion is not starting again from ground zero; it is the movement of the Way.

I described the natural movement of the Way in Chapter Three, specifically how the sage should “govern” the people with the “rule” of naturalness. As Laozi states,

Do not honor the worthy. This will keep the people from contention.
Do not prize rare things. This will keep the people from becoming thieves.
Do not display the desirable. The hearts of the people will not be turbulent.

Hence the governance of the sage:
Empties their minds and fill their bellies,
Weaken their wills but strengthens their bones.
Always render the people free of knowledge and desire.
Ensure that the clever do not dare to act.
Engage in non-action (wu-wei) and nothing will go unruled.
(Dao De Jing, ch. 3. Robert Eno, Trans., 2010)

Slingerland (2003) points out that, “by returning to naturalness himself through the practice of wu-wei, the sage is able to bring the rest of the world back to naturalness along with him” (p.108). This is what is meant by saying that the sage is able to “assist the myriad things in [returning to] naturalness” because “he who acts, fails; he who grasps, loses” (chapter 64, Eno Trans.). “Returning to naturalness” represents a return to the state of “great flowing along with” that once prevailed in the world (ch. 65). And this idyllic state of affairs—which would come about again if a ruler in Laozi’s own time could only grasp the Way—is described quite beautifully in chapter 32:
That way is enduringly nameless….  
If the lords and kings were able to hold fast to it,  
The myriad things would submit to their own accord,  
Heaven and Earth would come together  
And cause a sweet dew to fall,  
Which—though no one orders it—would naturally spread itself equitably among all the people  
(Rump, Trans., 1979)

The myriad things in the universe would naturally spread themselves without the external process of naming and controlling it. In other words, the wu is the Being without all of the desire, knowledge, and purpose in the conventional world. Such movement of the Way is open in its always already ongoing process. This way of being is precisely what Heidegger (1927) means by “the world worlding.” In Being and Time, Heidegger (1927) turns the noun (world) into the active verb (worlding) to describe a gerundive and generative process of world-making/becoming. For Heidegger, worlding is always, already ongoing; worlding is how we experience the world, not how we decide or predict the world. There is not an essentialist, fundamentally superior or universal understanding of worlding that is wholly attainable. Worlding is always already a complex and dynamic assemblage through which we must constantly work our way through to maintain “the Open of the world” (Heidegger, 1971, p.45).

The law of reversal, according to Laozi, is a return to the way of Being as it naturally moves, back to the roots, which means to let them grow from inside.

The philosophy of wu-wei provides different perspectives in approaching the human relationship with the world as well as human activities. However, Slingerland (2003) questions whether the philosophy of wu-wei runs into his own conceptual problem. He questions the paradox of wu-wei: “if, in fact, we are naturally good in a ‘so-of-itself,’ not effort fashion, why are we not good already? If the Laozian soteriological path is so effortless and spontaneous, why do we have to be told to pursue it?” (p.14). Wu-wei, which contains “wu” (nothingness,
Education as Dwelling in Unknowing

The concept of dwelling, first introduced to education by curriculum scholars such as Ted Aoki (1986) and David Jardine (1990), was originally Friedrich Holderlin’s idea in his poem cited in Heidegger’s (1971) essay, “… Poetically Man Dwells ….” In this essay, Heidegger focuses his discussion on two lines of the poem, “Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth,” in an effort to elucidate precisely what the poet means by asserting that man dwells poetically. Why does man poetically dwell on the earth? Guided by this question, Heidegger makes a profound distinction between two modes of being in truth—the scientific and the poetic. Heidegger believes the scientific truth has become too seductive, while man’s relationship to the world is one that is always in flux, never capable of being grasped in its totality. For Heidegger, dwelling relies on poetic creation. Dwelling enables us to stay with the heart (that is to say kindness) rather than with reason, as he quoted in Holderlin’s poem:

…. As long as Kindness,
The Pure, still stays with his heart, man
Not unhappily measures himself
Against the Godhead.
(Heidegger, 1971, p.226)

When Ted Aoki brought the metaphor of “dwelling” into education, he drew on this concept to criticize the western binary of “either/or,” which comes from the notion of rationality. To help the reader better understand this concept, Aoki uses a kind of bridge in Japanese gardens, the bridge on which “we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges lure us to
linger” (1986). The metaphor of the Japanese bridge allows Aoki to ponder on the frequently used phrases such as “either/or” and “both/and.” In trying to disrupt the binaries in curriculum studies, he argues that we need to not only give up the way of thinking in “either…or,” which is a typical dualism terminology, but we should also push even further in breaking the boundaries between “and” and the “not-and”. For example, the terms Western and Eastern still highlight the geological boundary and the cultural differences between the two. “What seems to be needed in curriculum inquiry,” he asserts, “is a general recognition of the epistemological limit-situation in which curriculum research is encased. Accordingly, we need to seek out new orientations that allow us to free ourselves of the tunnel vision effect of mono-dimensionality” (in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p.1). Jardine, based on his teaching experiences and his research on integrated curriculum, concludes that dwelling with a boundless heart may prevent “abandoning our children to an all-too-certain future” (1990, p.119).

Guided by previous scholarly works on the study of dwelling and the Daoist philosophy of wu-wei, what I want to particularly address in this section is that education needs more lingering. We need to recognize the experience of education, which is embodied in the students’ body and life, and turn to an ethical caring through the act of wu-wei.

The act of wu-wei is an orientation of being-with the world engaged with a transformative relationship of the way of being. If we applied the orientation in education, one possible (non)act would be the educational hesitation, as Biesta (2012) states. In the article No Education with Hesitation, Biesta distinguishes two types of educational hesitation: the practical hesitation and the theoretical hesitation. Specifically, practical hesitation is “the subtle moments where we hold back, where we do not want to know, where we leave space for something to happen that is fundamentally beyond our intentions and control” (Biesta, 2012, p.1). Compared to doing as the primary solution, practical hesitation encourages educators (including scholars,
school teachers, policy makers, and administrators) to step back and let happen. Stepping back indicates a belief in trust and openness. Instead of telling the students or the teachers what to do, practical hesitation leaves space for the students/teachers to be in the openness of classroom activities.

Theoretical hesitation is “an awareness of the importance of those aspects of educational processes and practices that are ‘beyond’ or ‘outside’ of a common (or perhaps we should say, an all too superficial) understanding of education-as-relation” (Biesta, 2012, p.1). As Biesta specifically argues, one of the problems in education is the fake tolerance of student creativity while we still use common standards in assessment. In other words, we may praise the students’ creativity during the classroom discussion; however, we still end the conversation with the same assessment and single-answer testing. This assessment is what Biesta means when he says “common.” Educational hesitation reminds us that taking on actions or making changes is not always the solution; we need to also be aware of the already existing relations and leave space for the not yet—the emergent experience in the learning experience—to happen.

Dwelling and hesitating both call for a pedagogy of ethics rather than a “right” pedagogy. Actually, dwelling comes from a root word meaning “to tarry” or “to hesitate,” as Berman et al. (1991) point out: “in a sense we think about dwelling when we pause to consider those stopping places, those points of rest or hesitation, or those places where tarrying gives deeper insights during various phases on the journey” (p.185). With the metaphor of dwelling, what we are calling for is the restoration of the person as a purposeful, meaning-making, caring being rather than an individual known by what he or she learns or does. Schools are dwelling places where relationships and communication have major importance. As van Manen (1991) points out, “pedagogy is not a rational formula or set of techniques to follow for effective teaching. It is rather, a personal and improvised tact and mindful thoughtfulness through which a
pedagogue tries to act in a right, good, or appropriate manner” (p.9) for the sake of what is best for the being and becoming of the learner. Educational hesitation and dwelling indicate a deliberate attitude of unknowing: the world is not knowable; it is acceptable to not-know. Unknowability shows respect for the Other.

**Pedagogy of Unknowing: An Ethical Call for Teacher-Student Relationship**

Questioning the primacy of philosophy as knowing with its propensity to grasp the otherness in epistemological terms problematizes the goal of education. As Abunuwara (1998) states, “Facts can be known, but Others cannot” (p.147). Therefore, the focus of education should not be on ‘knowing’ the Other (since it is impossible, anyway), but on a radical openness in communication and attention to the (unknowable) particularity of the Other (Todd, 2003). True communication between teachers and students is only possible when we consider others as unknowable. With the notion of unknowing, teachers should not consider students as knowable and fixed. Instead, they can invite the students to read, watch, and listen to others’ testimonies. In other words, teachers should provide spaces for students to witness the unknowable other.

“Witnessing,” as Zembylas (2005) explains, “acknowledges the contingency of one's subjectivities and nurtures unknowability without ending up creating either an antiepistemological or essentialist culture in the classroom. The concept of unknowing calls for action that is a result of learning to become a ‘witness’ and not a simply a ‘spectator’” (p.152). An ethical relationship based on the pedagogy of unknowing is not aiming to “know” the Other but to create relations with one another, which pushes educators to reevaluate what constitutes “education” and “education goals” in order to develop and nurture the relation with the Other.

**An Ethical Teacher-Student Relationship Appreciates Lingering**

When educators speak and argue, they hardly ever—and perhaps never—do so in order to confirm what is already there, but always do so with the suggestion that something ought to
change, and certain actions are the solutions. However, the future cannot be predicted. Rather, flexibility, according to Laozi, is the principle of changes, just as the wind blows spontaneously. Reflecting in educational politics, take the two most recent educational reforms in the United States for example. Both the “No Child Left Behind (NCLB)” and the “Common Core State Standards (CCSS)” are, as Laozi would argue, progressive actions that stand against the naturalness and the nothingness of the Dao, because the NCLB and the CCSS rely on fixed solutions that demonstrate educational outcomes with test scores. Constricted by such standards, students and teachers are always required to learn more, practice more, memorize more knowledge, spend more time on studying, set a higher standard for themselves, get higher scores, and so on. However, the philosophy of naturalness compels us to think differently. To move forward, step back; to become full, be hollow; to move faster, stop. Instead of rushing the students to move forward in a linear direction, lingering enables a space where both teachers and students can come back to themselves while engaging with the others. Lingering is not a movement, but a mo(ve)ment.

**An Ethical Teacher-Student Relationship Embraces Knowing in Being**

From national curriculum standards to state curriculums, from learning goals to testing knowledge, from school calendars to lesson plans, students learn activities constructed by others. When school administrators and teachers plan everything ahead, they forget that the objects for which they planned—the students—are engaging in various continual intra-active relations with the world. Educational practice is undecidable; “‘undecidable’ because not already decided, and in fact never decided and never decidable” (Raffoul, 2010, p.196). For Derrida, undecidability is the condition of decision, of the event. “If I know what I must do, I do not make a decision, I apply a knowledge, I unfold a program. For there to be a decision, I must not know what to do … The moment of decision, the ethical moment, if you will, is independent from knowledge. It is
when ‘I do not know the right rule’ that the ethical question arises” (Raffoul, 2010, p.297). The concept of unknowing encourages educators as well as learners to give up their position as “knowers” and engage in ethical relations which are prior to individual existence. Levinas (1969) uses the concept of “responding” to the Other in an unknowable relationship to replace epistemological phrases such as “answer,” “tell,” “inform.” Responding to the Other is not an issue of knowledge about the Other but implies approaching the Other as an ethical practice. This teaching/learning and the teacher-student relationship recognize the meaning and significance of process, relatedness, ethics, alterity, and unknowability in pedagogical activities. Consequently, teachers are no longer knowers; likewise, students are no longer learners. They are all unique individuals entangled with one another in an ethical relationship.

Furthermore, unknowing is not against knowing, but insists upon the notion of “knowing in being.” We get to know through experiencing and living. “There is only intra-acting from within and as part of the world in its becoming” (Barad, 2007, p. 396). The notion of knowing in being, deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy, is different from western reasoning, which is based on the mind-body dualism. The concept of “knowing in being” rewrites the human mind, body, and the world through their relation to one another. Barad (2007) discusses a similar idea when she writes:

We don’t attain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming… what we need is something like ethico-onto-epistem-ology—an appreciation of the intertwining of ethics, knowing and being. (p.185)

Similar to the body-thinking in Daoism, which considers knowing as experiencing in relations, Barad emphasizes the being-with-the-world relationship in this paragraph. It is through the complex, entangled interactions with the world that we get to know the world. The pedagogy of
unknowing can occupy an important place in teaching/learning and teacher-student relationships, a place that embraces the *unknowable*, in general, as well as the *unknowable Other*, in particular. I argue that turning toward the pedagogy of unknowing offers us an alternative with which to conceptualize the teacher-student relationship and the unknowable in educational praxis.

Both Barad and Laozi are against the notions of individuality and determination. For them, ontology, epistemology, and ethics are the always already existing entanglement. What is in the world (ontology) and what we know that is in the world (epistemology) cannot be separated as though they do not affect one another. From this point of view, there are no subjects and objects in learning. Teachers are not the subjects who are full of knowledge, nor are students expected to become the new subjects through the acquisition of knowledge. Escaping from the pursuit of knowledge, learning is about intra-actions among the participants (teachers, students, etc.), matter, space, and time. Human beings, as part of the universe, belong in the ever-changing context of existence. Learning will not happen unless we access the process of emerging ideas and activities.

**An Ethical Teacher-Student Relationship Is An Intra-Active Relationship**

The intra-action of the universe is a deeply ethical matter. “We (but not only ‘we humans’) are always already responsible to the others with whom or which we are entangled, not through conscious intent but through the various ontological entanglements that materiality entails” (Barad, 2007, p.393). Only through ethical relations can we acknowledge the Other as the Other. Considering the Other as an unknowable alterity encourages teachers and students to give up their position as “knowers” and engage in ethical relations. Therefore, it is not knowledge or knowing the Other that is important in learning, but our orientation to the Other's unknowability as the starting point for learning.
The teacher-student relationship should be an ongoing intra-active relationship. According to Levinas, “To understand a person is already to speak to him, to posit the existence of the other by letting him be already to have accepted that existence, to have taken it into account” (Levinas, 1981, p.6). This always already engaged relationship doesn’t mean that my existence is prior to the thought of the others, but that my existence is identified through the intra-actions with the Other. In other words, no individual teacher or student independently exists without the other; no teachers or students pre-exist. Appreciating ethical being in education disrupts the dichotomy of teacher/student. The concept of “becoming-child” is one of the examples in rethinking the teacher-student relationship from this ethical intra-action. Based on the notion of becoming-child, the destination of a child is neither child nor adult or anyone else. In other words, there is no destination in the process of child-becoming. Along with the notion of unknowing, the concept of becoming-child further challenges educational teleology. As I argued in Chapter Three, childhood is not the period of preparation for adulthood; the student is not on a trajectory to become someone who already knows. Child (student) and adult (teacher) are at the strict contemporaneousness of the adult and child. In other words, both teachers and students are fellow travelers in the process of learning with, about, and from others. It is not knowledge or the knowledge of the Other that is important but, rather, our orientation to the Other's unknowability as a starting point of an ethical relationship.

In conclusion, I argue that under the pedagogy of unknowing, the goals of education would be re-conceptualized as an act of ethical responsibility that recognizes the uniqueness of the individual. In addition, revealing the meaning of unknowing in the classroom would break the boundaries between epistemological knowing and ontological being of teachers and students. Overall, unknowing embraces otherness and presents a curious element of redemption; in the lack of knowledge, the meaning of its absence is found.
CHAPTER FIVE
SILENCE AS THE END/BEGINNING

In the beginning heaven and earth are nameless;
When named, all things become known.

— Laozi, Dao De Jing. (emphasis added)

Silence reveals itself in a thousand inexpressible forms: in the quiet of dawn, in the noiseless aspiration of trees towards the sky, in the stealthy descent of night, in the silent changing of the seasons, in the falling moonlight, trickling down into the night like a rain of silence, but above all in the silence of the inward soul,—all these forms of silence are nameless; all the clearer and surer is the word that arises out of and in contrast to the nameless silence.

— Max Picard, The World of Silence. (emphasis added)

A pedagogy of unknowing, as discussed in Chapter Four, is a recognition of process, alterity, relationality, and uncertainty in education. With these notions in mind, educational researchers and teachers, as the main audience of this study, are not expected to figure out the “bluebook” in implementing the pedagogy of unknowing. Also, I do not think that such guides should ever be created. Moving away from the modern obsession of knowing, the pedagogy of unknowing indicates a plenitude of openness, the not-yet in education. Therefore, I invite you into a quiet dwell; I invite you to be in this inquiry without the desire for a single answer. This is a response, not an answer. A response, as Levinas (1981/1974) indicates, is neither an affirmation nor a contradiction but that which nevertheless allows the conversation to continue. Being well aware of the desire for certainty in modern society, this chapter gives up on the notion of “lack of,” “absence,” and “negation” in understanding silence and looks at silence from its ontological meaning instead. Embracing the ontological silence in education is responding to the call of listening—listening to silence.
Why Silence?

Silence… It is an alternative way of concluding this study other than with a fixed statement, as the last chapter of a dissertation is intended to do. Instead, it offers an open space for the *not yet said*. In addition, the concept of silence that I develop in this chapter is a response to the “now what?” question that readers might expect scholars to answer after they propose a new pedagogy or theory. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, a pedagogy of knowing is not necessarily followed by actions with the purpose of change. Non-action and silence can also be powerful in educational practice.

**Silence as Non-conclusion**

“In the beginning heaven and earth are *nameless*; When named, all things become known” (Laozi, ch.1. Xu Yuanchong Trans, 2005.emphasis added). Silence is the nameless Laozi meant. It is not the conclusion, it urges us to ponder: What would it mean to practice *slowly* and *uncertainly* in the classroom? What would it mean to practice a *quiet* conversation? A pedagogy with fewer guarantees? A practice less caught up in a logic of means and ends? A conversation that was more generous? The shift from a conventional pedagogy of knowing to the ethical turn—the pedagogy of unknowing—is attuned to the “willingness to give up on our compulsion as researchers to fix our current practices, is to become undone in ways that produce new practices and ways of thinking/doing/being researchers” (Mazzei, 2013, p.105). Moving away from certainty advances the “sneaking suspicions that something may be wrong with what we currently believe, while keeping a watchful eye… that something else, something other, still to come is being missed” (pp.73-74). This something else, this other, this search for the other is a purposeful seeking of Derrida’s (1967/1976) trace, an “always already absent presence” (Spivak, 1976, p. xvii). In other words, or *without words*, this research for the other, this still to come, this impossible that is more interesting than the possible—certainly less predictable and provocative
of more interesting results—is a search for silence. It is the silence that is “at once contained within it [speech] and transgresses it” (Derrida, 1967/1976, p.22). In other words, silence as the nameless and not yet known enables new possibilities in its absent presence.

In addition, the absent presence of silence welcomes listening rather than conclusion. When we listen, the sound is already there; before the sound emerges, we cannot be prepared to listen. We may not be able to create strategies to listen to the sound or silence because we cannot be attentive to them when they occur. However, the nature of silence welcomes listening within its absent presence. It is a surprise. Listening to silence is set in motion by something that “calls upon and addresses us, … overtakes (sur-prises) and even overwhelms us, to which we must respond, and to be responsive and responsible. Endlessly” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p.51). In this sense, listening to silence is an ethical response, in the form of surprise. Welcoming silence in education provides spaces for uncertainty and creativity, as I will address again in a later section.

**Silence as a Response**

Silence serves as a response to the problematic pedagogy of knowing. The modern pedagogy of knowing highly values the pedagogical activities that relate to knowledge acquisition and representation. There are two main pitfalls of knowledge, as Huebner (1962) insists: The first is the prejudice of knowledge. Huebner points out that, “Man is apt to forget that reality is not seen ‘as it is,’ but through a man-made lens which filters out certain information and organizes the rest into patterns which exist not necessarily in the world, but in the eyes of the observer” (p.38). Knowledge, as the representation of what we know about the world, is a man-made product that satisfies a humanist system. “I look, and I think I see, I listen, and I think I hear…. What I see and hear of the outer world is purely and simply a selection made by my sense as a light to my conduct” (Bergson, 1965). The second disadvantage of
knowledge is associated with the problem of time, or preferably, duration. The abstractive apparatus and the knowledge system that serves it, tend, in general, to take still snapshots of things. Human beings abstract from the processes of life as if their only meanings were in the spatial world, not necessarily in the temporal. Knowledge tends to be mapping in space, not in time. To recognize processes through time, human beings are inclined to think in terms of stages. Children go from stage to stage in their development, and insects go from the egg stage, to the larvae stage, to the pupa stage, into the adult stage. Human beings find it difficult to conceptualize or know through time, to organize time as they organize space.

The pedagogy of unknowing, which interrupts the progress of teleology in knowledge acquisition, is a willingness to give up our compulsion as learners to acquire as much as we can; it is to give up the desire of knowing through the ways that embrace being, knowing, and ethics in our lives. The pedagogy of unknowing resists a type of intension in knowing or doing; it is a willingness of undoing, of not-knowing, of being. Silence, as a way of being from eastern philosophy, especially Taoism, needs to be recognized in the classroom.

**Contextualizing Silence**

Sound and silence are both hard to put into words, and both carry ontological meanings in their nature of "being-with-the world." Silence is a complex phenomenon which is difficult to explain. Silence occurs most obviously with sound, for example, music, speech, thunder. Silence also occurs in conjunction with human performances in which no sounds are engendered. When we try to define silence, we instantly realize the limitation of language that not everything can be represented through it. van Manen (1990) clarifies three different kinds of silence in practice, which are literal silence, epistemological silence, and ontological silence. The silence I will discuss in this section, which is the largest body of works on silence, is liberal and epistemological silence. According to van Manen, literal silence refers to the absence of speech
because speech may not convey all of human thoughts, emotions, and actions. Thus, more speech does not necessarily generate better human communication. As Li (2004) points out, “the commodification of knowledge at the higher education level especially seduces or compels professional scholars and researchers to be ‘productive’ in making speeches, an equivalence of making goods” (p.74). Additionally, van Manen defines epistemological silence as experiencing the ineffability of certain types of knowledge or skills in certain contexts. As Spivak (1987) points out: “the problem of human discourse is generally seen as articulating itself, in the play of, in terms of, three shifting languages: language, word, and consciousness” (p.77-78). Therefore, “epistemological silence as the indicator of the breakdown of the interlocking triad (language, world, consciousness) can raise awareness of how these dynamic factors contribute to the process of knowledge construction” (Li, 2004, p.76). Contextualizing silence from an epistemological view, this section will review the study of silence in three different forms: silence and mastery of language; silence as oppression and resistance; silence as waiting time and meditation in the classroom.

**Silence and the Mastery of Language**

Speech and silence are closely related to each other; as Picard (1952) describes, “silence was woven into the very texture of the whole approach to knowledge” (p.63). We get to know through language, including spoken and written language. The knowledge we know has to be represented/named through language in order to communicate and to be carried on through generations. Language, in making the world understood, reduces the world to what is understandable—knowledge. As Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) point out, “The moment we say what silence is we reduce it to speech; we are merely *speaking of silence*” (p. 197, emphasis in original). The mastery of language is practiced in two ways: totalize and exclude. Firstly, the totalization of language that can be expressed into or known through language is how a certain
kind of silence can be achieved—“through the taken for granted labeling, naming, ‘hailing,’ or interpolating people as subject position” (Clair, 1998, p.41); secondly, it can be achieved by excluding/ignoring what cannot be known/expressed, the unspeakable. Both ways show how language masters other voices: the former is rooted in the western culture, which privileges reason and rationality as the dominant way of knowing, while the latter represents how power, in the embodiment with language, works in silencing multiple voices. However, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue, “language is not life; it gives life orders. Life does not speak; it listens and waits. Every order-word, even a father’s to his son, carries a little death sentence – a Judgement, as Kafka put it” (p. 76. emphasis original).

Understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the relationship between silence and communication can contribute to an understanding of “the limits and power of language” (van Manen, 1990, p.112). Michel Serres specifically discusses the mastery of language in relation to communication and silence. There are two major points worth highlighting here (if not all) from Serres’s study on silence. Firstly, language can be understood as a form of mastery over our everyday practice, as a form of domination of other ways of thinking and knowing. Serres uses “debate” as “a trope for the ways in which our language and conversation merely serve to repeat what has already been said, to the exclusion of creating new ideas,” as Procknow (2011, p. 115) reviews in her dissertation. According to Serres (2004), by the end of the debate, whomever survives makes a “mute decision” to “abandon forever the arrogance of their ancient destiny, the paranoid project of occupying the whole Earth for themselves alone” (p.89). In such a defensive process, language is used as a weapon against different voices. However, there are other possibilities to let others be heard who have the drive to name and to know. Secondly, Serres (2004) discusses the “fault line” (p.75) of language between what can be said and what is inarticulable. Language, according to Serres, traps our way of thinking from something new in
an almost invisible violence. Language itself shapes our way of thinking and excludes the unspeakable from the discourse. In the next section, I will focus on the power of language and silence to further discuss silence as oppression and resistance through language.

**Silence as Oppression and Resistance**

Intellectual archives are filled with voices. However, not every story has been told. Research on silence is often focused on the silenced voices, especially in feminist studies. Several feminist authors’ perspectives on silence, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Susanne Langer, are useful for understanding the discipline side of silence. For example, Simone de Beauvoir (1949/1952) exposes male-dominated theories of gender difference and how women are defined as “other” in relation to men. She argues that on one hand, man is “caught between the silence of nature and the demanding presence of other free beings” (p.687). On the other hand, “woman, therefore, is absent while present, her existence speaks of her silence” (p.28).

Langer (1942) describes how human activities are centered on the making, using, and abusing of symbols. She specifically emphasizes how language can emancipate as well as trap us. Besides de Beauvoir and Langer as the two primary figures in the feminist movement for understanding silence, two other important contributors’ voices cannot be ignored—Mary Daly and Tillie Olsen. Daly (1973) spoke of the “Great Silence” that makes women invisible throughout history and erases all clues that a matriarchal society could have existed prior to patriarchy. Her treatise, *Beyond God the Father*, addresses the institutional enforcement (i.e. Catholic church) of silence. Tillie Olsen’s (1978) work on silence, which began in the 1960s and culminated with her book *Silences*, launched a series of explorations into the topic of silence and silencing. Olsen highlights the ways that women writers are silenced through their everyday experience as wives and mothers, how their works are marginalized by the academy, and how they are virtually erased from anthologies of classic writers. In addition, MacKinnon (1979) addresses patriarchal
silence as enacted through the horrors of sexual violence perpetrated against women and children who are further silenced by the institution of patriarchal law under the guise of freedom of speech. Lewis (1993) and Miller (2005) also write about silence as oppression; the way minorities, particularly women, are silenced in academia; and the ways in which one can overcome silence. Jones (2004) speaks of silence as a deliberate and political act made by the other. Specifically, the minorities in the classroom may elect not to speak under the very legitimate assumption that what they have to say will not count because it does not fit with the dominant discourse spoken by the majority.

Oppressed silence is when one is forced into being silent for different reasons (abuse, ignorance, exercise of power) and where the oppressed “believes that he or she does not have a voice and/or would not be heard” (Alerby, 2003, p. 50, emphasis in original). Oppressed silence, however, can also be when no time or space is given for reflection. In this light, we can see the constant filling up of silent space as a form of oppression. It is a way of preventing students from thinking, a way of dominating their thoughts by not allowing them time or space to think.

Furthermore, Jürgen Habermas (1979), in his theory of communicative action, provides a theory of discursive closure that addresses how communication can silence and how the “ideal speech act” can emancipate. About the ideal speech act, Clair (1998), guided by Habermas, writes, “power distinctions must be eliminated in order for speakers to speak freely so that no person is silenced” (p.34). Foucault (1973 a, 1973 b, 1977, 1982) provides a postmodern position on power, discourse, silence, and resistance. Foucault points out that discourse creates knowledge regimes that in turn affect power relations. And the privilege of certain discourses can marginalize weak or oppressed groups. Subsequently, people begin to consider the current social structure order as a given, as reality (Giddens, 1979). I agree with Clair’s critique of Habermas and Foucault. She writes,
Neither of these two theorists [Habermas & Foucault] explicitly articulate that they have been influenced by feminist work on silence. Nor do they focus on the silencing of women, in particular. Feminists have argued that the critical and postmodern perspective, in part, marginalize and ironically silence the oppression of women. (p.34)

Similar critiques were brought out by Mackinnon (1991) and Phelan (1990). For example, Mackinnon, in responding to Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, insists that “the silence of the silenced is forgotten in the noisy discourse about sexuality which then becomes its history” (p.4). Foucault’s contribution in discussing silence and resistance, “lies in his ability to expose subtle forms of domination, to render the power/knowledge regime visible and to make clear the discursive construction of the subject” (p.37, emphasis added), rather than liberate the silenced silence. For instance, in revealing the power of labeling, Foucault (1970/1966) points out that while women, children, and minorities may fall into ambiguous categories, it is of the utmost importance to remember who is creating the category system. No category exists in nature. Categories are invented, as Bateson (1972) would agree. About the power of language, Glenn (2004) writes,

The power of language itself, however, can yield silence in cases where words and actions are used to impose silence on someone else or to suggest silence as the best tact for someone else. Thus, those who embrace silence in these situations do so for psychological and intentional purpose. That person must remain silent or be hurt in some way, some emotional, intellectual, physical, or professional way. The silencer dominates the silenced, once again gendering the conditions of speaking and silence. (p. 41)

In recognizing how silence serves as oppression or resistance for minorities, bell hooks (1989) points out that “Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible” (p.9). Without disagreeing with hooks, I argue that this
strategy involves the risk of talking without listening. When we are so invested in engendering more voice, when everyone is busy with speaking, who is listening?

Silence as Waiting Time and Meditation in Classroom

Silence could be valued by educational practitioners and scholars in different ways. Li (2004) shows that “waiting time” in the classroom increases the number of words in students’ responses as well as the number of unsolicited responses. Such “waiting time” while calling for a pause in classroom discussions eventually produces more speech. Zhou’s (2012) study on the pedagogy of listening warns the teachers about the “fake” pre-condition of listening. He argues that this waiting time is where the teachers await for the students to provide a better, or identical answer to what the teachers expect. There is no space for listening to happen within the waiting time. Applied to the classroom, compared to the talkative students, those with no words or right answer come out after the silent waiting time would be silenced.

Efforts also have been made in actively embedding silence in teaching and learning, such as Magda Gere Lewis’s (1993) *Without a Word: Teaching Beyond Women’s Silence* and Anne French Dalke’s *Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach*. Both explore the meaning of silence by internally reducing the use of words and practicing teaching and learning with silence. Dalke (2002) writes,

> When silence is embedded in our speaking, we may better hear what is said and better give it voice; moreover, silence alone may be fuller, richer, more replete than language can ever be, an evocation of that which is too full to be spoken, so deep that it defies expression. (p.109)

Such silence, in reducing the violence of language totalization, engages the students in an intimate, dynamic relationship. As Suhor (1992) argues, “When we are most successful, our students have a sense of well-being which is intimately linked with the inexpressible, the
ineffable—that is, with silence” (II). In embracing silence as a way of welcoming the other, Glenn (2004) hopes to open silence as an imaginative space, a space that invites the other, as she claims:

Silence, in this sense, is an invitation to the future, a space that draws us forth. There is no one but rather many silences, and like the spoken or written, these silences are an integral part of the strategies that underline and permeate rhetoric. Thus, silence is at once inside the spoken and on its near and far sides as well. (p.160)

In relation to classroom teaching and learning, there is also literature on silence as meditation (Kalamaras, 1996-1997; Alerby, 2003; Hill, Herndon & Karpinska, 2006; Stock, 2006; Nelson, 2006). Kalamaras, for instance, points out the benefits of silence. He writes, “the practice of meditation offers trust in intuition, ambiguity, and chaos as well as trust in the reciprocity and interpretative quality of experience” (p.23). Similarly, Marilyn Nelson (2006) uses meditation in her courses at the United States Military Academy at West Point in Creative Writing, teaching her cadets to listen to silence.

I have, so far, discussed literal and epistemological silence from three different perspectives—silence mastered by language, silence as oppression and resistance, as well as the silence of mediation—which indicate important issues to attend to and develop. However, while power relations and strategies have been covered in the literature, silence as a spiritual experience was barely touched except for the practice of meditation. Moreover, silence as a way of being rooted in continental philosophy and eastern culture doesn’t get much attention. The next section will, therefore, enrich the meaning of silence from its ontological aspect.

**Silence in a New Plenitude: Ontological Silence**

Silence is too often read as simple passivity or negation. However, it allows a relationship of being-with the Other and calls for listening as a way of ethical caring. While major scholarly works on silence consider silence as an epistemology in exploring the silencing
aspects of communication and the expressive aspects of silence, as discussed above, in this section I turn to a new plenitude by focusing on the ontological meaning of silence.

“One cannot imagine a world in which there is nothing but language and speech, but one can imagine a world where there is nothing but silence” (Picard, 2002/1952, p.17). With no oral or written sounds to occupy our minds, silence allows for an awareness of the self and beyond. It also allows us to experience unpredictable things; through silence, imagination can function. Silence has no beginning or end: “it seems to have its origins in the time when everything was still pure Being. It is like uncreated, everlasting Being” (Picard, 2002/1952, p. 17). Maitland (2008) also explains the ontological character of silence in A Book of Silence. She says,

    Silence may be outside, or beyond the limits of, descriptive or narrative language, but that does not necessarily mean that silence is lacking anything. Perhaps it is a real, separate, actual thing, an ontological category of its own: not a lack of language, but different from language; not an absence of sound, but the presence of something which is not sound.

By claiming silence as an ontological category, Maitland tries to disrupt the structure of our thinking, which privileges speech, word, sound, and language over silence. She clarifies that silence is just something different from language, but it does not lack anything, nor is it supplementary to anything, it is itself, as silence.

It should be noted that this new understanding of silence calls for a different structure than the epistemological perspective. Ontological silence indicates awareness of “the realization of our fundamental predicament of always returning to silence—even or perhaps especially after the most enlightening speech, reading, or conversation” (van Manen, 1990, p.114). This type of silence is both content and discontent with discursive practices. “Ontological silence is neither an invitation to make more speech nor an initiation to pursue absolute silence. Instead of sustaining the dichotomy of silence and speech, ontological silence indicates a need to attend to the
dynamic interconnections between them” as Li (2004, p.76) further explains. In the following section, I look at the characteristics of ontological silence.

The Nothingness of Silence

Even when the last star has imploded and only blackness remains, the Tao will be Tao: emptiness in emptiness, silence in silence, nowhere, yet everywhere; beyond existence, yet the essence of life.

Jos Slabbert, 2000, *The Tao is Tao*

Only when there is silence, there is sound. However, the (non)existence of silence is not for sound. Silence, according to Laozi, is nothing. And everything comes out of silence. Silence, in this sense, is an ontological principle. Instead of privileging speaking over silence, Taoism has valued the unspeakable wisdom of silence within its long cultural tradition. Laozi appreciates the “actionless” /“non-action” based on his philosophy of nothingness. In practice, “teaching without words” is not uncommon, as Laozi points out that a sage manages things without action and teaches without words. In *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 2, Laozi says,

For truly Being and Not-being grow out of one another; Difficult and easy complete one another. Long and short test one another; High and low determine one another. Pitch and mode give harmony to one another. Front and back give sequence to one another. Therefore, the Sage relies on actionless activity, Carries on wordless teaching.

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7 The translation of chapter 2 was retrieved from: http://www.for68.com/new/2006/8/fi0791683315186002720-0.htm.
“Wordless teaching” cannot be understood based on its literal meaning. It reveals Laozi’s philosophy of teaching from two aspects. First, “wordless” doesn’t mean teaching without words/speech, but avoiding drawing conclusions based on obvious phenomenon or judging from names. Laozi’s concept of wordless indicates a way of teaching with naming and labeling, which are the two major issues in the crisis of representation. In addition, by the concept of “wordless,” Laozi emphasizes the power of everyday practice among teachers and students, rather than teaching by telling. For instance, the students would be kind to the others if they were treated kindly by their teachers; a child learns how to love through the love he/she receives. Back to the notion of nothingness, Laozi asserts, “Everything achieves life in existence; existence arises from nothingness” (ch.40). In other words, nothingness is not absence, but the “infinite plenitude of openness,” as Barad (2012, p.16) points out.

The infinite plenitude of openness echoes the transformative life in “Wu” that Laozi identifies. Laozi further argues that “when a thing has existence alone it is mere dead-weight; only when it has Wu, does it have life” (Lao zi, ch.40). Here, “Wu” refers to “being in relations;” it indicates the complicity of the universe, which is full of indeterminacy and changes. The concept of “Wu” usually appears with “You” (presence, written as “有” in Chinese), but they are not in a dichotomous relation. “You” and “Wu” indicate the simultaneous and inescapable tension between presence and absence as it appears in the yin-yang symbol. Against the notions of determination and individual isolation, Laozi, instead, considers ontology, epistemology, and ethics as the always already existing entanglement. Hence, what is in the world (ontology) and what we know is in the world (epistemology) cannot be separated as though they do not affect one another. The nothingness of silence, which embraces the world and what we know is in the world together, vanishes the boundaries of existence into the disclosedness of being in silence.
Silence Exits in the Absent Presence

Language, in its determinateness and display of knowledge, and its capturing of the present, prevents newness from appearing. Silence, different than language, which is based on the linearity of time, is beyond the fixed language and predictable time. Instead, silence is what Levinas (1985) means by the saying. In distinguishing the saying from the said, Levinas writes, “the saying is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it. The saying is a way of greeting the Other, but to greet the Other is already to answer for him” (p.88). The saying indicates the already always existing relationship of “being-with” the others; it is “how I respond to the other without words and knowledge,” it is the not yet said in its absent presence. This to-be-said is what Dauenhauer (1980) refers to as “deep silence,” which is the silence whose ontological meaning I am interested in exploring more.

Dauenhauer (1980) describes deep silence as the relationship between persons relating themselves to something other than an object, and thus as something that cannot be measured. Procknow (2011) explains the relationship between language and the traditional concept of time, in that the clock time that we normally use is a time that measures and divides and also controls the possibilities of language, in part because if the ontology of our being depends on knowing, then time and language are fully implicated in knowing. “Time is measured and controlled in an effort to know and predict. Language is implicated in ontology, demonstrates knowing” (p. 150). Deep silence cannot be measured because there is no object to measure or utterance to be said about it; there is no way to linearly organize silence as before, during, or after some other utterance. The other, not bound or thematized by time, resists being spoken about or named. Deep silence is based on a different time structure, as Dauenhauer points out, a Bergsonian time—the duration. Duration as a flow rather than linear, measurable time, as I discussed in Chapter Three, is a connection to what we have not been able to see before and what has not yet
been named; it does not have the intent to act. Different from the traditional scientific time, which represents the past, duration indicates a future yet to come; it is the experiencing of time which is embodied in the present. Such absent presence is an opening plenitude toward Otherness.

**Silence Has No Boundaries**

Unlike epistemological silence, which might be used as a strategy for controlling or resistance, ontological silence has no boundaries. According to Heidegger (1927/2010a), he who says anything cannot keep silent at any given moment; and keeping silent is only possible in genuine discourse. “To be able to keep silent,” as Heidegger states, “Dasein must have something to say—that is, it must have at its disposal an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself” (p.208).

Ontological silence is probably only possible in genuine discourse because genuine discourse doesn’t encourage negative silence without a tendency to speak or force silence without freedom to speak. It is the ability to keep silent during the conversation that enables the space that allows or even transforms silence as a part of the conversation. Therefore, whether continuing to speak or remaining silent, the point is to make one understood in discourse. Because, as Heidegger (1927/2010a) states, “discourse is constitutive for the Being of the ‘there’ (that is, for states-of-mind and understanding), while ‘Dasein’ means Being-in-the-world, Dasein as discursive Being-in, has already expressed itself” (p.208). During a nonstop or full speech, silence is destroyed, “When language ceases, silence begins” (Picard, 1952, p.15). However, this statement doesn’t mean silence begins because of the cease of language; simply it is the absence of language that makes the presence of silence more apparent. Silence releases the space from the occupation of words in dialogue. In silence, everyone connects to each other through the disclosedness of Dasein.
Silence Is an Active Performance

Silence is not absence or negation of language; it is not necessarily negative by not having sound. As Picard states, “silence contains everything within itself. It is not waiting for anything; it is always wholly present in itself, and it completely fills out the space in which it appears” (Picard, 1952/2002, p.17). Silence usually occurs in conjunction with human performance. The occurrence of silence in conjunction with other phenomena besides sound points to a further fact about silence. Silence is not merely linked to some active human performance; for example, the moment I close my eyes and feel the beautiful warm sunshine in the fall, or the moment of peace and silence during meditation—that is itself an active performance. Hence, silence is not necessarily linked to sound, but it does involve conscious activity.

Speech and silence usually come side by side, however, privileging speech at the expense of silence might prove dangerous. As Procknow (2011) points out, “Language, as it is practiced in the classroom, serves to have students and teachers repeat. Even in our class discussions, the aim is typically to ‘keep the conversation going,’ out loud” (p. 125). The language, which can be repeated, is the informational language, which is structured by orders, grammar, and patterns. Within such kind of language sphere, the students have no time/space to slow down to think and listen to the others. Performative language, instead, is communicational, as Deleuze and Guattari assert (1987). According to them, the theory of the performative sphere, and the broader sphere of the illocutionary, has had three important and immediate consequences:

1) It has made it impossible to conceive of language as a code, since a code is the condition of possibility for all explanation. It has also made it impossible to conceive of speech as the communication of information: to order, question, promise, or affirm is not to inform someone about a command, doubt, engagement, or assertion but to effectuate these specific, immanent, and necessarily implicit acts. (p.77).
Language is not content with the code, order, or rules as linguists usually functionally define; it cannot be used as a functional tool to transmit information, set order, or question a previous statement. Because once language is spoken, the order or the given moment in language is interrupted in the *saying*. The language can only be accomplished by *saying* it, by engaging in communications. Deleuze and Guattari continue to the second consequence of the performative sphere of language:

2) It has made it impossible to define semantics, syntactics, or even phonematics as scientific zones of language independent of pragmatics. … (3) It makes it impossible to distinguish speech and language because “speech can no longer be defined simply as the extrinsic and individual use of a primary signification, the meaning and syntax of a pre-existing syntax. Quite the opposite, the meaning and syntax of language can no longer be defined independently of the speech acts they presuppose. (p.77-78)

As Deleuze and Guattari point out, semantics, syntactics, and phonematics reveal a reductive model of how we limit the meaning of language within individual functional units. Such a scientific approach isolates language from its living field: the speaking of language; instead, it tries to define language in a fixed, organized, repeated structure that can be followed and apprehended. Hence, whatever cannot be categorized in syntactics or semantics, like poetry or silence, is less mentioned in the scientific zones of language. In addition, through the distinction between speech and language, Deleuze and Guattari address the active engagement of *saying* in speech compared to the *said* (the defined, fixed, ordered statements in language). According to them, there is no individual enunciation; enunciation engages in collective assemblages. The core character of emergence and relations of language, as Deleuze and Guattari described in the quote above, is attuned to Levinas’ notion of the “saying” and “said.”

Levinas and a number of other theorists (i.e., Serres, 2000; Doll, 1993) reveal the major pitfalls of language, including: language is constituted by knowledge; language, as what was
already said, is trapped in its fixedness; language is based on the linear concept of time. In particular, Levinas remarks that “Knowledge is a re-presentation, a return to presence, and nothing may remain other in it” (2001, p.76, emphasis in original). What Levinas is explaining in this quote is that knowledge, via the process of knowing, totalizes the differences to the same, and so it prevents any movement in time. Knowledge merely re-presents what has already been done, said, and discovered. To borrow from Serres’s phrase, “knowledge kills”! Knowledge is not something that comes in sound bites and is repeatable or testable, and, as Picard (1952) claims, “When language is no longer related to silence it loses its source of refreshment and renewal therefore something of its substance” (p.26). Silence, in other words, interrupts the “order” or “statement” language tries to affirm. Silence, as absent from statement, enables more possibilities beyond what can be said in language. This is based on the notion that language is communicational, and silence enables imaginative space with the absence of language. I argue silence is an active performance.

The Wisdom of Silence in Education

Besides considering silence as waiting time and the practice of meditation as I reviewed in previous studies, silence, especially ontological silence, might inspire educational practice through several other ways. This section will address the wisdom of silence in education from two aspects: a) silence and the wisdom of unknowing; b) silence and listening.

Silence Echoes the Wisdom of Unknowing

Chapter fifty-six of *Dao De Jing* claims, “the Way [Dao] that can be spoken of is not the constant Way [Dao].” To unpack it, the Dao is the “nameless” that is the “beginning of the ten thousand things,” but it is not *one* of the ten thousand things, since it is not reducible to any single thing. The Daoist fear or distrust of words is at the heart of the “wariness of reification.” Daoists believe that the Way, in particular, cannot be spoken because to speak of it, in some
sense, reduces its power. The Dao is the source behind that which appears (i.e., the ten thousand things), but it is not that which appears. “Thus, to speak of the Way, as if by doing so the Way is captured by knowledge and concepts, is to speak ‘unknowingly’” (Finazzo, 1968, p.32).

Similarly, Heidegger believes, “in talking with one another, the person who keeps silent can ‘make one understood’ (that is, he can develop an understanding), and he can do so more authentically than the person who is never short of words” (Heidegger, 1927/2008, p.208). The wisdom of unknowing, which is one of the core concepts of Daoism, moves beyond an epistemological system of knowing and knowledge. The unknowing of the other will invite listening: listening to the other, listening to the silence, with a listening body and a listening heart.

Similar to the art of “white space” in Chinese painting, silence as the absent presence might generate students’ imaginations in education. White space, which originated from traditional Chinese paintings, refers to the blank in a painting with any ink. It later becomes a reserve for expressing ideas of authors and a significant artistic processing philosophy for “virtual” serving the “real” and “non-being” supporting “being.” The blank on the painting does not mean “empty,” but is a great pursuit for the artistic realm. The relation between the presence and absent presence (white space) gives the painting a broader, imaginative conception. The traditional Chinese ink painting has its unique positions in art history because it is an art of expression rather than representation or reproduction. Expression manifests the presence of being. The presence of the being, the signifier, is the major difference between the traditional Chinese ink painting and the realistic painting, which emphasize the signified. The signified is what existed on the canvas, while the signifier, the expression, depends on the interactions between what existed and what was not said; it enables the audiences’ participation and imagination in approaching the artistic, poetic, and philosophical meaning of the painting beyond
what is painted. Such expression does not emphasize specific skills and techniques of painting, but the charm of the painting spirit. Silence, similar in its absent-presence to the white space, might generate more imagination within teaching and learning.

**Silence Calls for Listening**

“Listening,” Heidegger states, “is constitutive to discourse. Listening to…. is the existential being-open of Dasein as being-with for the other” (1927/2010a, p.158). In order to listen, two preconditions are needed: firstly, the existentially primary potentiality for listening; secondly, that oneself and the other are already being together. Thus, listening to each other, in which the relation of being-with already exists, leads to mutual understanding and the possibility of discourse. Both discourse and listening are grounded in understanding, according to Heidegger: “Understanding comes neither from a lot of talking, nor from busy listening around. Only one who already understands is able to listen” (1927/2010a, p.159). Therefore, listening is a course of opening up, achieving, and manifesting a human nature. Listening indicates the willingness of being-in-relation with the other. Dauenhauer (1980) describes silence in which the one performing the silence yields to another:

In attributing to silence its third characteristic, namely, that silence involves a yielding, I am simply spelling out what is implicit in the acknowledgement that the performer of silence is not radically autonomous. This yielding is a yielding before some power which is beyond one’s control. It is a yielding which is experienced as motivated by finitude and awe. In performing silence, one acknowledges some center of significance of which he is not the source, a center to be wondered at, to be in awe of. (p.25)

It is the moment when words and language fail, because one is in relation with that which is not nameable. Such relation is a relation of being-with instead of knowing with the aim of control.

The awareness of the relationship of “being-with” calls for discourse among teachers and students with an appreciation of listening and silence. Listening, especially listening to silence,
indicates an attitude of ethical caring for the other. Listening, from this sense, is not limited to sounds; it is the listening body/the listening heart that engages us in an ethical relationship with the Other. A pedagogy of listening puts mutual listening between teachers and students at the core of education. As Zhang (2012) describes, when listening becomes an attitude of caring and intellectual engagement infiltrating the whole body and mind rather than merely a hearing through the ears, we shall have the virtue of listening in the classroom.

**Listening to Silence**

Silence calls for listening. However, when we talk about listening to silence, what do we listen to? And how? To respond to this question, I would like to go back to Levinas’ concept of *saying* again. When there is word, it is the *what* that has already been said, what has been named and represented through language, which closes the communication. Listening, as I discuss here, is not listening to words. Rather, we listen to the saying—the not yet come, the openness of possibilities. Specifically, listening to another is listening to the person as an ontological being which cannot and should not be reduced to language (names, labels, categories, etc.). Further, when we are willing to listen, we are willing to listen to people without what we already know about them; instead, our orientation is to the Other’s yet to come. Such hospitality of welcoming the other first is what Levinas identifies as the ethical responsibility to the other. We are listening, and we respond in a way that does not consume the other; we are able to respond in ways that we did not know were possible when we were busy using words to name everything around us.

Embracing the silence that has been ignored/interrupted in educational practice not only challenges the authority of subjectivity but calls for an ethical relationship of listening in education. “Unless one can realize this intimate relation with Others, one can hardly get into genuine leaning”, as Heidegger states in *What Is Called Thinking* (1954/1968). The role of
teaching is “being-in-relation-with” the world. What can be learned are not chunks of knowledge that can be added to our previous knowing; rather what can be learned is our being related to the world in which we live. For Heidegger (1979/1992), “knowing is always a mode of being, of Dasein, of the basis of its already being involved with the world” (p.161). Silence, as the preliminary constitution of listening and part of the listening objects (listening to silence), erases the functional dichotomy between speech and silence. Knowing is no longer the center of education; knowing and being are not completely separated. Applied to educational practice, both our understanding of subjectivity and learning need to be reconceived. Firstly, the teacher-student relationship under this ontological perspective is neither a knowledge relationship nor a willful act of the ego, but an ethical relationship of responsibility among teachers and students. Secondly, by getting rid of knowing as the goal of education, learning is not about the acquisition of knowledge or truth, it is about “response” or “responding,” as Biesta (2003, p.64) argues. Different from answering, responding is more about learning from the questions and questioning. “Respond to” indicates an ethical relationship to the Other where you respect the other’s alterity without forcing her/him to take your idea; but at the same time, this responsibility allows you to respond to the Other with ethical caring. Learning, in this sense, is an activity of “respond[ing] to” the Other within the learning community, rather than “learn[ing] from” any knowledge authority.

Listening to silence should disrupt silencing silence or speech. Edward Said (1994) expounds that one must develop an exilic intellectual’s ability to “see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way. Look at situations as contingent, not as inevitable, look at them as the result of a series of historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings” (p.60). Reflecting on the power structure that might be caused by the polarization of silence and speech, Li argues that “educators must not deliberately silence
silences because silencing silence as an intentional pedagogical act could ratify speech as the privileged form of human communication. Instead, it is essential for educators to question the polarization of silence and speech and to challenge the primacy of speech in current discourse of multicultural education” (Li, 2004). The power structure that was accumulated behind silence, speech, and the intentions of silencing silence should not be ignored in our discussion on silence. In pedagogical practice, we may sometimes notice that the teachers purposely use the silent moment when they are willing to claim their authority over the students or are in the process of evaluating their students’ abilities to reproduce the factual information and knowledge disseminated by them. In students’ group activities, some students are usually automatically silenced or silenced based on their academic performance or their level of speech among the other group members. To silenced people, the desire and ability to speak out is a liberating process.

I return to my question, “when everyone is busy with speaking, who is listening?”

Recalling Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1998/1968), the oppressed frequently strive to imitate the oppressor in their “initial struggle for liberation” (p.27). However, the high risk of such action is that the oppressed, by transforming from objects to subjects, become the new oppressor. What we should do, according to Freire, is turn to all people “in the process of permanent liberation” (p.30). The oppressor and the oppressed must both be liberated, “For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning” (Mandela, 1995, p.751). However, Freire’s notion of liberation through raising people’s awareness of the tension between the oppressed and the oppressor is problematic because it is still embodied in epistemology, in awaking people’s consciousness through knowing. Levinas and Derrida offer an ethics “without rules, imperative, maxims or clear objectives other than a passionate moral
conviction that the Other should be heard” (Davis, 1997, p.144). Such a non-violent approach to the Other insists that listening to the other demands the ethics of hospitality (Derrida, 2002).

In dealing with the situation of whether or not to forgive somebody who has caused us significant suffering or pain (i.e. the oppressor), Derrida brings up the notion of forgiving the unforgivable based on the aporias of the impossible possibility. The forgiveness of the forgivable does not forgive anything, Derrida argues, therefore it is not forgiveness. If forgiveness is possible, it must forgive the unforgivable, which is the logical aporia according to Derrida. He explains, “if one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls ‘venial sin’, then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear” (Derrida, 2001, p.32). Therefore, if there is something to forgive, it would be the unforgivable crime or harm. “Forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable. One cannot, or should not, forgive; there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgiveness” (Derrida, 2001, p.32-33). When we talk about forgiving, we are talking about the unforgivable, the unforgivable that remains unforgivable, “the unforgivable that resists any process of transformation of me or of the other, that resists any alteration, any historical reconciliation that would change the conditions or the circumstances of the judgement” (Derrida, 2002, p.385). The concept of forgiveness announces itself as impossibility itself. The constancy of begged forgiveness also indicates the impossibility of forgiveness because forgiveness remains denied, and therefore is impossible. The impossibility (unforgiveness) keeps launching/haunting the possibility (forgiveness) in its impossibility (unforgivable). Derrida attempts to reveal the possibility of the impossible as a site of the ethicality of ethics from two aspects as Raffoul (2010) points out: “on one hand, ethical responsibility will be referred to an impossible to the extent that one may conclude that responsibility itself is impossible” (p.288); on the other hand, “the very impossible will be presented as condition of possibility of responsibility” (ibid.). The impossible of the possibility
shifts the western philosophical tradition from knowing to unknowing—in other words, the philosophy of ethics.

“Ethics must do the impossible,” Raffoul says, “To forgive can only happen where it is impossible to forgive;…Hospitality must welcome unconditionally” (Raffoul, 2010, p. 287).

As Derrida discusses the possible conception of hospitality, to be hospitable requires a few conditions. For example, it requires the ownership of the property in order to be the host; a certain level of control over a house in order to serve the guests; and also, a welcoming gesture to the guests, even the unforgivable ones. “Whether one invokes the current international preoccupation with broader control, or simply the ubiquitous suburban fence and alarm system, it seems that hospitality always posits some kind of limit upon where the other can trespass, and hence has a tendency to be rather inhospitable.” In the meantime, there is unconditional hospitality, which involves a relinquishing of judgement and control in regard to who will receive that hospitality. In other words, hospitality also requires non-mastery, the abandoning of all claims to property or ownership, and forgiveness even before the arrival of the guests. As Derrida (2002) states,

Forgiving would be opening for and smiling to the other, whatever his fault or his indignity, whatever the offense or event the threat. Whoever asks for the hospitality, asks, in a way, for forgiveness and whoever offers hospitality, grants forgiveness – and forgiveness must be infinite or it is nothing: it is excuse of exchange. (p.380)

Forgiveness is at the heart of hospitality if there is failing, fault, offence, or even sin to be forgiven on the very threshold, according to Derrida. First, “welcoming is welcoming the infinite,” and therefore welcoming, as Derrida says, “beyond my capacity of welcoming (something that results in my always being behind, in arrears, already inadequate to my hôte and to the hospitality I owe him)” (Derrida, 2002, p. 380). Second, hospitality includes welcoming the unpredictable arrival of the guests: “Hospitality does not only consist in welcoming a guest,
in welcoming according to the invitation, but rather, following the invitation, according to the surprise of the visitor, unforeseen, unforeseeable, unpredictable, unexpected and unpredictable, unawaited. Hospitality consists in welcoming the other that does not warn me of his coming” (Derrida, 2002, p. 381). Lastly, the welcoming one not only needs to forgive the welcomed one, it must also ask forgiveness from the welcomed one, even prior to the former’s own having to forgive. From this sense, a condition forgiveness shares with hospitality, according to Derrida, is perhaps its give without return, or else nothing. “When hospitality takes place, the impossible becomes possible but as impossible” (Derrida, 2002, p.387). The hospitality of human beings is what makes listening (im)possible.

Listening to silence, and listening to silenced people, is to reclaim and welcome the silenced voices and their culture. Listening to the silenced people does not aim to let the hidden voice become the new dominant language but to welcome various voices into dialogue.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Silence is everywhere: it exists in our breath, movement, and speech. Silence is nowhere: it is invisible, inaudible, it has no boundaries; yet, it cannot be represented other than by silence itself. In silence, we find the always already existing connections between human beings and nature. Listening to silence means we are dwelling/living with the world, in the world; listening to silence means we nurture the wisdom of being through the ethics of hospitality, rather than consciousness and knowledge. When we listen, “The silence of the sage mirrors the essential words of those ready to listen to him” (Slabbert, 2000, verse 29).

Recognizing the meaning of silence and the significance of hospitality, the distinction between teachers and students are blurred with the relationship of being-with-the-other. This involves moving away from a linear implementation of the curriculum towards a discursive,
relational, authentic practice of curriculum. An authentic education involves a reclamation of the fullness of mind and body, a return to the ethics of the Other, as education can have a deep and lasting impact on “the ways people can be attuned to the world” (Aoki, 1987, p. 360). The teacher-student relationship shifts from the dualistic relationship to a relationship of “being-in-relation-with-others.” The being-with relationship, as Laozi indicates, follows the law of reversal, how human and nature originally dwell in the world. To be educated, as Aoki (1987) calls for, “is to be ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human” (p.365), entangled in the already-always ethical relationship with the other. Poetically, we humans dwell in the world.

At the end, one difficulty in writing this dissertation should be explicitly admitted. Attempting to write about the unnameable and unknowable silence is at once a struggle with the language of curriculum theorizing itself. The language and the tenor of educational theory and practice have, in many circles, taken on measurement, certainty, techniques, method, and knowledge in educational discourse. The pedagogy of unknowing as I proposed in this study appreciates the uncertainty and ethical relationship in education. Such education is education of life. Understanding that life or the universe involves a multitude of different interweaving and intersecting voices; living in the plateau of (im)possibilities is part of the phenomenon of the pedagogy of unknowing. The struggle with language is not something we need to rectify before inquiry begins, but it is precisely what must be recovered in the relationality of education. The pedagogy of unknowing does not only critique how differences were totalized through knowing, but also calls for the realization that “the only thing we know is that we don't know”; it is a move away from comprehending to living.

At the beginning, there was silence; Eventually, everything goes back to, silence.
EPILOGUE

It took me a year to start the writing of this dissertation after my proposal defence. I kept on reading and didn’t know how to start. Writing is such a linear, word by word, sentence by sentence process, while what I want to express are the relations, the entanglement of the relations, uncertainty, unknowing, and silence in education. I always admire great writers who can express what they want to say in a very accurate way yet allows space for readers’ interpretation and imagination. The teacher-student relationship is not a new topic; during the middle of my dissertation writing, I even felt it is over studied/discussed in education with a technical, reductive approach that it is no longer interesting. While I was stuck, Patti Lather’s work on how to “analyse” the “data” in qualitative research inspired me. She reminded researchers that it is not only what we have accomplished that is valuable to our study, but also what we get stuck on. The things you get stuck on reveal the new possibilities that you didn’t/couldn’t predict in the research plan, and that might be more valuable for your study.

I turned back to the teacher-student relationship, but this time I focused on why I don’t like the current understanding of teacher-student relationships, what shaped current teacher-student relationship, and what an authentic teacher-student relationship would look like. With this new lens, I realized that the traditional teacher-student relationship, which could be generalized as a subject-object relationship, is based on the notion that the primary goal of schooling is knowledge acquisition. Under such a structure, the teacher-student relationship is defined as a dual relationship with specific boundaries. The teachers are supposed to be the ones who know, and the students are considered as the ones who need to learn. Such a relationship is so well structured that it lacks openness, intra-action, and emergence in student’s inquires.

Deep in my mind, teachers and students are interchangeable; the teachers learn from the students, while the students learn from the teachers. The main difference between teachers and
students is not in the authorities of knowledge. There are certain boundaries between teachers and students, but the boundaries are continually changing as the intra-actions emerge. And such intra-actions are eventful, according to Derrida, and unknown. The beauty of the unknown is that it provides an open space for pondering and dwelling. The teacher-student relationship should be first and foremost a human relationship. And human beings, according to the Chinese Taoism, are in a harmonious relationship with nature. The eastern concept of nature, which embraces the physics and the spirits of nature, considers relationship as the core of the world; everything is always already entangled in relations. Recognizing the meaning of silence and unknowing, the distinction between teachers and students is blurred with the relationship of being-with-the-other.

At this point, the teacher-student relationship became clear in my study: 1) There are no stable boundaries between teachers and students. Teachers and students are in the web of relationships, and such relationships are interactive and complicated; 2) It is through the intra-actions among the teachers, students, learning materials and environment that students make meanings of what they learned; 3) Lastly, the teachers are not the ones who are supposed to know the right way of teaching, but rather the teachers and students should welcome the uncertainty of education through the pedagogy of unknowing.

Philosophical concepts are powerful in inspiring me to think and empowering my ways of thinking. Silence has been one such “magical” concept in this study. Ontological silence came to me before I started the last chapter. In such an open plenitude, no conclusion seems necessary or possible at the end. The absent presence of silence welcomes listening rather than a conclusion. And through the listening we hospitably welcome the other in education.

At the beginning of this dissertation, I was eagerly trying to figure out where this study should go; by the end of this study, I realized that the path is in its process: unknown, yet everywhere. As one of my favorite philosophers, Laozi, reminds us, “A good traveler has no
fixed plans, and is not intent on arriving.”
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Shaofei Han was born in Shandong province, China. Shaofei received her bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Ludong University in 2007 and master’s degree in curriculum and instruction from East China Normal University in 2010. She began her doctoral program in the School of Education at Louisiana State University in 2012. Later on in her studies, she enrolled in the Department of Philosophy for her master’s degree in 2017.