

## *Book Review*

Granger, Colette. (2011). *Silent moments: An autoethnography of learning, teaching, and learning to teach*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

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“Yet this much seems to have been worthwhile.”  
(Granger, 2011, p. 234)

In education, what do we find to be significant? A version of this question might be: ‘what counts’ in education? This is an ontological statement in the guise of a question, in that something of significance must first *be something*, at all. Significance is also prepositional – something ‘counts’ in relation to something else – and normative, in that having to ask the question at all creates a field of things which ‘do not count.’ And not everything counts in education; part of articulating an educational research project is demonstrating both the existence of our object and its effect on education, its actors or institutions. However, there are other forces of circumscription that come after but are perhaps more powerful than ‘significance.’ These cohere around the notions of scope and scale. Although everything surely ‘counts’ to someone, how many people does something have to affect (scope) before it becomes significant in education, and how must its effects register (scale) in order

to be recognized as such? What do we do about aspects of education that do not register at all, that are silent but never absent?

Several schools of thought in education have challenged the rules of scope and scale which tacitly guide accountability-driven rules for 'what counts' in and as educational research, where these rules tend to recognize only phenomena affecting many people in measurable, observable ways. Riding with some of these schools, including critical discourse analysis and psychoanalytic, narrative and feminist theories, Colette Granger (2011) intimates that our ideas about 'what counts' as experience, as data, and as problems, even, are *off*. In *Silent moments: An autoethnography of learning, teaching, and learning to teach*, Granger carefully weaves narratives of her own lifelong education together with theory into an argument for the *importance* of stories smaller in both scope and scale; stories that are perhaps less urgent, more personal and even largely unspoken. My choice of importance over significance here is intentional in that Granger's text offers a destabilization of significance altogether, at least in the more commonsensical iteration that I sketched above.

Much of this destabilizing work happens through a close engagement with psychoanalysis (Freud, Winnicott, Klein, and Britzman & Pitt) and the ethics of radical alterity (Todd's writing on and from Levinas). These two thinking projects challenge us to relocate our ideas of 'what counts' away from what we can know for sure. Whereas Levinasian ethics foregrounds the Other's sheer unknowability, psychoanalysis invites thinking about our own unknowability, even to ourselves. But this bare fact of unknowability is far from an intersubjective or pedagogical impasse, as Granger suggests:

All our individual sets of goings-on are, always, on-going.  
Perhaps, if we can begin to take into account those goings-on in the Other that we do not know, and those goings-on

in ourselves that we cannot know, we can imagine a kind of *pedagogical third*, made out of that very unknowability, that contributes to the structure and the movement of an educational encounter. (p. 232; original emphasis)

Imagining this pedagogical third, something made from our originary incapacity to know ourselves nor the Other, is a little like working a meta-knowability in that everyone's educational encounters proceed in the midst of a doubled unknowing. Granger suggests 'silent moments' as starting places from where we might find this different sort of significance in unknowability. Silent moments are occurrences of significance to education that refuse to present as significant, mostly because they are barely registered as things, events, happenings, at all: when what is supposed to happen just doesn't. The '*just doesn't*' is key in Granger's examples of such moments, which include exercising one's right to drop a high school course, complying with a hostile mentor teacher, and resisting theory through minimal engagement. Conventional wisdom dictates that these silences are too small, too personal and too belated – we come into knowing about them, their causes and implications only much later, if ever – to register as problems worthy of concerted attention: to 'count' for anything at all in education. Granger shows us, however, that they most certainly do.

Three times over the course of the book, Granger re-visits one such silent moment in the history of her own education, revealing more information each time about what happened and probing for its significance. A key theoretical and methodological contribution here is her direct yet nuanced challenge to the value of representational truth in research; for although the three narratives each document a different perspective on a 'real' event – Granger did in fact drop high school English despite being good at it – their content is re-imagined or altogether fabricated. Instead of analyzing her guidance counsellor's

genuine notes from the conversation with the author-as-adolescent, we are given Granger's own reconstruction of what these notes *could have been*. By applying her analytic framework to these notes, an ostensibly 'fictional' narrative segment, Granger asserts the two-fold significance of research objects that could *possibly* have existed.

First, Granger brings a psychoanalytic reading to her own reconstruction of the notes and so models the doubled reflexivity of the psychoanalytic autoethnographic method at the heart of her text. Second, by privileging an openly 'made up' object, Granger demands the reader's complicity in taking down the very possibility of telling whole, honest, true stories. In her words, "here is a little twist. If an actual experience is always fuller than any account of it can be, it may also be that the account can paradoxically exceed – by being other to – the experience. Personal narrative or life writing is not made just from what is internal to the individual; nor, once made, does it remain there" (p. 55). We cannot know where storying our experiences will take us, or where it has already. And if we accept the significance of all stories and storyings, both large and small, both 'true' and made up, we accept a changed 'significance' in educational research: "thinking about one [particular] story of education, or indeed mis-education, might help us think about others – and Others – not as mutually isomorphic, but rather as a set of moving, shifting beings, (id)entities, processes that might, at some times and in some places, embody in common some history, motivations, and desires, and also some worries and fears" (p. 98). This is the meta-knowability whereby our very personal, seemingly insignificant stories become otherwise. For Granger, our research will have been significant if engaging with it helps others to think. And this is enough; this counts.

This is risky research: made up objects, whole chapters on a single recovered and re-storied event in the life of the author, an insistence on the importance of analyzing research objects regardless of their facticity. But where we might expect bravado, we instead follow Granger through

an autoethnography sometimes as much about methodological anxiety as silences in education. Pervading the text are caveats, disclaimers, repetitions and long exegetical interjections. Granger has read widely and thoroughly, and liberally shares the fruits of her labour with the reader. This is most often welcome; given Granger's commitment to clear and accessible exposition, the text could serve as an introduction to psychoanalytic theory as a hermeneutic in qualitative research. However, such exegesis is often distracting, sometimes jarring and seems to gesture towards a worry about her own methods and theoretical project in places where this is not already explicit. Given that *Silent moments* is an autoethnography and that Granger is open about the vicissitudes of her own writing process, however, reading these interjections as symptomatic feels like less of a criticism and more of an observation in line with Granger's own self-positioning in the text.

As is perhaps fitting for a book about silence, critical reviewers could take aim at what it *does* contain, rather than what it omits, as is common reviewing practice. The book is divided into three parts, and the first and third come together seamlessly. Their chapters all take up different moments in Granger's educational history such that her object – silence – and method – psychoanalytic autoethnography – can run wild and unfold in great recursive and reflexive detail. On the other hand, the second, middle part of the book at times felt like a detour away from the main story about silence, education and the importance of attending to objects of unconventional significance in educational research. Its two chapters – one on children's curiosities about sexuality and the other on teachers' resistance to using instructional technologies – are not convincingly framed as relevant to the topic despite Granger's efforts to do so in both the introduction and conclusion. It was with some relief that I began to read the third and final part: an insightful and characteristically accessible psychoanalytic take on Granger's experiences of practicum teaching inflected with readings of a related

literature that, although coming before, is not autoethnographic. On this note, one omission bears addressing. Given that Granger is a teacher educator and demonstrates a deep interest in the complexities of this position, I was surprised to see that she did not at least take up the growing quasi-autoethnographic literature on self-study in teacher education practice in order to explain its silence in the text. But following Granger herself, we might ask what she is here using silence to do.

Overall, *Silent Moments* offers an uncommonly clear and theory-intensive introduction to Granger's method of psychoanalytic autoethnography as well as an important re-framing of the significance conversation in educational research and curriculum studies. While similar arguments have been made before, Granger brings many of them together alongside an authentic, moving and compelling personal narrative of working – as a student, teacher, student teacher, teacher educator and doctoral candidate, partner, parent and friend – to find the significance of silent moments in her own life story in education, a significance that is often denied in a research discourse that favours objects of broader scope and greater scale. But, as Granger argues, the difficulties of learning are often most embodied in what does not happen and in what goes unsaid. Attending belatedly to these small silences is perhaps the only way to go given the time lag that is education's reality principle across all of its practices and areas of concern. Granger shows us a way to move in its midst: forward, backward, sometimes sideways, but always somewhere.