

**Book Review: *Betweener Talk: Decolonizing Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Praxis***

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**Abstract**

A review of Marcelo Diversi and Claudio Moreira's (2009) book, *Betweener Talk: Decolonizing Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, and Praxis*.



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**“The view from somewhere is the closest an author can get to a polyvocal text.”**

~ Claudio Moreira (2009, p. 195)

This book review is presented in three acts. Act I adopts a performative text, borrowing from St. Pierre’s (2008) notion of text as research participant, resulting in the “interviewer” drawing on the book under review as a compilation of “participant” data sets. In Act II, found poetry is used to interpret and re:present the doing and being of Diversi and Moreira’s research as ethnographic and autoethnographic text, and as methodological inquiry more generally. In un-final Act III, the research adopts a (slightly) “traditional” academic genre of book review as genre, situating the book, *Betweener Talk: Decolonizing Knowledge Production, Pedagogy, & Praxis* (Diversi & Moreira, 2009), with/in a construct of how the book might come to be read by others.

**Act I – Understanding the Writerly Frame**

[Interviewer, Marcelo and Claudio sitting around a table in relatively comfy chairs, leather club chairs perhaps, a scene rather “academic” in nature, all three are relaxed, the room temperature is pleasant, there is potable water for all, probably bottled....]

**Interviewer:** So Claudio, Dr. Moreira, may I call you Claudio in this first person, autoethnographic, disruption-of-hegemonic-academic-discourses (sort of) context? What I hear you saying, Claudio, is that your research is located at, within, and around the sites/sights of struggle. Is this an apt description of the location of your writing?

**Claudio:** “We see this book as a stage where we perform our dialogue over social justice in the world we inhabit” (Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 14)

**Interviewer:** Indeed, it seems, Dr. Diversi, Marcelo if I may, that if one is interested in social justice, interested in contemplating the implications of research that uses, as a starting point, a decentred, postcolonial construct, that one may be, as I indeed found myself at the beginning of your text, predisposed to being open to the possibility of liking the book. How do you work to foster this *ouverture d’esprit* in the reader?

**Marcelo:** “It’s not a formula or magic power. It’s about trying hard to listen to the Other with maximum attention and the least amount of prejudgement I can, even as I try just as hard to be aware of what my prejudgements may be” (p. 16).

**Interviewer:** And what is it, then, that you mean by *betweeners*?

**Marcelo & Claudio:** “We are claiming this position, betweener, not to fix our identities but to situate ourselves in the socially constructed, fluid space from which we are writing, thinking and giving meaning” (p. 19).

**Interviewer:** Right, then, so really, in a poststructural sense, you are calling on socially constructed and discursively produced notions of subjectivity, decentering both yourselves and your research through your *Betweener Talk*, is that it?

**Marcelo & Claudio:** Yes, we draw on the notion of identity in a Bakhtinian sense, that is, our “identities are not inside individuals but in the space between interacting

individuals” (p. 20)...“We do not know how this will work for you. But we think this writing joint-venture exemplifies the very connectedness and co-construction of meaning that we advocate in any type of social science preoccupied with empowering praxis” (p. 28).

**Interviewer:** What you are attempting, then, might be seen both as an act of resistance and as an affirmation of the shifting methodological boundaries of social science inquiry; is that accurate?

**Marcelo & Claudio:** “We are not postcolonial scholars, because we don’t make sense of the orderly implication that the world was once precolonial, or the implication that one can ever claim the higher moral ground of having achieved a postcolonial state of being...The in-between space from which we write is a constant site of struggle... not a metaphorical site but a bodily, visceral site” (pp. 206-207).

### Act II – Fragments

[‘Uncle’ Marcelo, “*Tio*” the elder, is embedded as a street educator in Campinas, Brazil, struggling with the lines that resist linearity, the boundaries that will not be fixed, the categories of human and of value and of agency, and none of the above; Claudio is shape-shifting back and forth, back and forth, from Brazil to the United States, from child labourer to PhD student, from friend to husband, from janitor to scholar, recounting fragments of soccer fans, neighbourhood rapes, and unwritten social rules of survival in a life-as-lived, providing an autoethnographic account of the push/pull dance between and around doing and publishing and not doing and not publishing and accepting and rejecting discourses of academia and of poverty and of the day that presents itself to be lived but for those who die before the day ends; the interviewer carries her copy of *Betweenner Talk* home from the office, back to the office, on airplanes, into hotel rooms, back on airplanes, scribbling, highlighting, getting drawn in by the words, getting sick to her stomach from the words, taking breaks, restarting, rereading, reconnecting with narratives, with research as disruptive and reiterative, as centred and decentred, as storied lives, as life....]

in an unphilosophical sense<sup>1</sup>

life is unfair

the lived experience of the oppressed in any circumstance

[the kid who] doesn’t know how to live on the streets

[what kid can possibly know how to live on the streets?]

i have to adjust to those other

they do not have to adjust to me

remember, life is fragments...

my life does not make sense

to place my body as an allied other

tell your Western-trained mind to stop looking for details or categories

I...just lived my life

soccer has a strong role in Brazilian society

he does not fit in society, he resists it

he fights

he sells his body

when i got there, i saw two bodies lying next to each other on the corner

it is part of being Brazilian  
 tell your Western-trained mind to stop looking for details or categories  
 [do not delude yourself into thinking Brazil is so far away from here]  
 when “history” and “heritage” are nowhere to be found or claimed and granted  
 as if we can measure the unmarked  
 we the product of colonial rape  
 how in hell do we claim and get granted whatever we decide to be?  
 [collecting “next moments”<sup>2</sup> in qualitative inquiry]

### **Act III – As if Academic Discourse Really Existed...**

[Drs. Diversi & Moreira are no longer in the interview studio; they are at their respective universities, writing grants, or in Brazil, doing "fieldwork," or sitting at a computer writing a book review of someone else's book for some other academic journal, or they are with their families, or they are out being in the world, loving their friends; with a bit of luck, one might catch their road show in Urbana, Illinois—it might move a person—another academic that is—to tears, or to action, or to just plain scare a person into thinking differently about *how* she/he/you/they/we are as academics, as researchers, as scholars, as humans, being; the interviewer is doing her last attempt at the review, in front of her home computer... it is late at night, quite cold outside, she worked past six in the evening, but—performing good mother before performing good academic—had chopped ample vegetables the day before, had turned the crock-pot on earlier in the day before leaving for the university... having made a hearty, healthy stew for supper, she shared a meal with her family, tucked her children into their warm beds, and she may have even made herself a cup of coffee before sitting down to do the ‘final edits’ of her unfinished and unfinishable “book” “review” – academia is shifting, fragments....]

Dear Marcelo, Prezado Claudio, Chers collègues,

I am left with the impression that your book will be relevant to both practicing scholars and doctoral students interested in pursuing decolonized approaches to auto/ethnographic research. You offer altered ways of viewing research “participants,” and you call attention to sites of struggle that happen in research spaces, which are the life spaces in view of and without regard for the work of academics.

The organization of your book, with its emphasis on polyvocal, shared, individual and decentred fragments is, in spite of the chaotic spaces life presents, rather fluid. You move from section to section in an accessible manner, even though the brutal content is thick with life and blood and oppression. Though I stopped often to breathe, to think, to ignore and to process, I did read your book in a linear fashion, the “traditional” way, from beginning to end. Having read the book in its entirety, I now feel confident to dwell in and among – and between – the fragments, and to add my own thoughts in the margins, claiming the undefined spaces of marginality as a place for the interaction, cross-germination and possibility of ideas not fully formed. I think these decentred musings are rather connected to the overarching methodological point you were trying to make.

I would, and I will, recommend your book to colleagues. Though not a “light” read, it is an important one. For autoethnographers, it is a must-read; for scholars

working within other theoretical and methodological frameworks, I feel your book holds the potential to incite researchers to question their own boundaries and assumptions, and to engage sites of struggle with passion, critical inquiry, and commitment, setting aside the delusional expectation of a fixed result in favour of dwelling in the “problematic of scholarship production” (p. 178).

Sincerely, another scholar.

p.s.— Claudio, I read your words with patience and care, trying hard to listen well, and it seems to me they are “doing and being” better English.

## References

Diversi, M., & Moreira, C. (2009). *Between talk: Decolonizing knowledge production, pedagogy & praxis*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

St. Pierre, E. (2008). Decentering voice in qualitative inquiry. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 319-336.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>All the words in Act II are found poetry, words originally produced by Diversi and Moreira (2009), rearranged and reproduced here. Only the prose in [ ] were added by the author of the review.

<sup>2</sup>After Denzin (2000, in Diversi & Moreira, 2009, p. 37)