The Convolutedness of Decolonizing the Mind—How Do We Get There?

© Gertrude Tinker Sachs

Georgia State University

Correspondence concerning this editorial should be addressed to Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Ph.D.,

Georgia State University, College of Education and Human Development, 30 Pryor Street,

Atlanta, GA 30303.

Contact: praxisubiquity@gmail.com

The Convolutedness of Decolonizing the Mind—How Do We Get There?

It has been almost 50 years since the assassination of Martin Luther King, so I chose the Atlanta Streetcar with the backdrop of Ebenezer Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue in Atlanta as the picture that I want to use to represent myself in this editorial. I use Ebenezer Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue because this is the place where Dr. Martin Luther King preached, and the church is also on the street where he lived. I have adopted Dr. King's mission and vision in my life to make the world a better place for all humankind. The context of his life and preaching, his moral stances and those visionaries, particularly Mahatma Gandhi, who impacted him, are very important figures in defining who I am and what I am about. Gandhi was also an important spiritual leader in India's independence movement against Great Britain, a former colonizer of the Bahamas, my home country. The question I have raised in my title of this editorial—"The Convolutedness of Decolonizing the Mind—How Do We Get There?"—is an ongoing quest for me. I am stating in this question that our minds are convoluted or bombarded by many competing complex forces and complicated by our many histories. So, I am asking, how do we move on in seeking clarity, in decolonizing ourselves or stripping ourselves of the vestiges that may serve to hamper the human spirit and the ways we portray ourselves?

The streetcar is a recent newcomer to Atlanta's public transportation and takes you places at a slumbering, or what I would call a reflexive, pace with time to think and ponder our actions as we move through life. I too want to go to new places in my travels and in my professional and personal life, but, ultimately, I want to carve new niches and expand my horizons in my thinking and ways of being for a more impactful life.
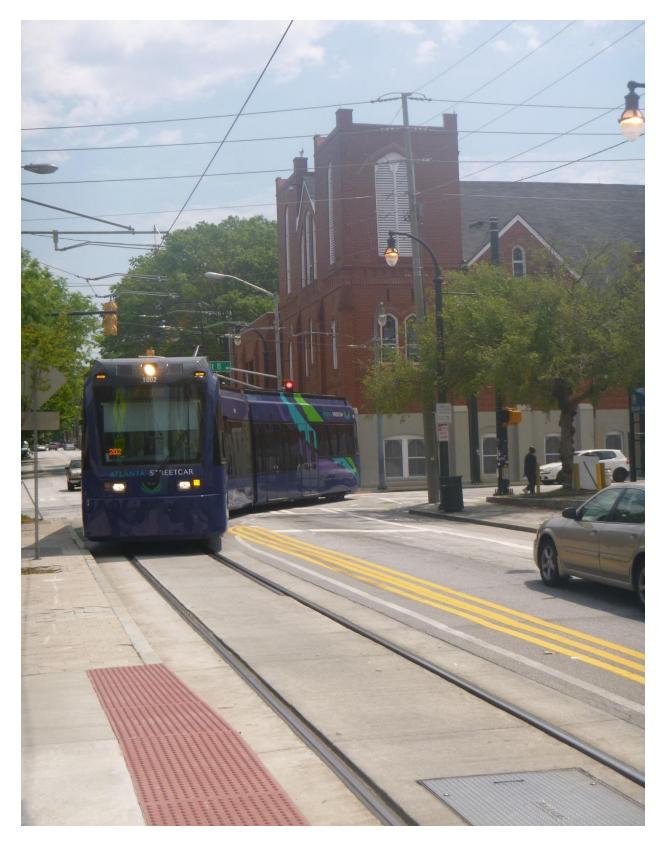
Figure 1. Atlanta Streetcar on Auburn Avenue in front of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta.

But how we see ourselves and how others see us are often conflictual, and one's ways of (re)presenting and being (re)presented are very much, to reiterate my key phrase, "convoluted things." We may need to divest ourselves of the colonizing forces and ways in which we (re)present ourselves and view others. Erving Goffman (1959) in his classic text, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life,* states that "life itself is a dramatically enacted thing" (p. 72), and I wonder, how we can be our best selves, and what prevents us from being our best selves? Noted postcolonialist, Edward Said (1978), insists that amongst the audiences for whom he wrote *Orientalism*, it was also for the readers in the "so-called Third World…to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others" (p. 25). He further states that "cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not 'truth' but representations" (p. 21). According to cultural critic Stuart Hall (1997), "representation is neither as simple nor transparent a practice as it first appears and that, in order to unpack the idea, we need to do some work on a range of examples, and bring to bear certain concepts and theories, in order to explore and clarify its complexities" (p. 7).

In this themed edition of *Ubiquity*, we are looking at *Exploring the Performative Arts* or some examples of representation. In our call for this edition, we, as editors, set for our writers several questions including:

1. How is teaching an act of performative art, in the classroom, community, and elsewhere?

For Praxis, this is the central question and our contributors for this edition have responded in a stellar manner in their pieces. Sigler's *Where the Page Meets the Stage: Storytelling through*

Words and Movement captures the excitement of a group of 5-16-year-old students in a summer workshop where they created stories and then recreated them on stage. What was impressive to see in Sigler's pre- and post-data survey was how the children changed in their perceptions of themselves as authors.

In Brett's *Using Visual Art to Teach Students to Perform as Informed Responders*, his quest is to help 12th-graders "see" how their visual and perceptual acuity of understanding the authorial voice in artistic expressions is akin to seeing the authorial voice in traditional text. He draws on students' strengths in the visual arts to forge connections and (re)present their appreciation and understanding in traditional text. Brett describes and reflects on his praxis for making his quest a reality in his students.

Hall, Hoyser, and Brault's *Embodying Performativity in Story-to-Poem Conversion* helps to convince us of respecting and using storytelling as a generative literacy approach. They describe building collaborative storytelling through developing deep listening and dialogic spaces built on empathy and respect for one's own and other's stories. They detail with examples and reflections, how to convert our stories into poems, songs and movies.

In Margaret Piccoli's *Words Matter: Creating Academic Language in the Classroom Through Improvisation*, we get a clear understanding of the importance of academic language. The author provided us with sound examples of how to help students access and utilize academic language through improvisation to represent their understandings and ideas. Piccoli offers us techniques, strategies, and activities to help make this happen in our own classrooms.

Last but by no means least is Rust's *Mother-Scholar Tangles: Always Both This and That.* Rust's piece reflects the complexity of performativity and being both mother and scholar. She uses autoethnographic methodologies coupled with Facebook postings to portray the

diverging, converging, "mashed-up-ness" of her life and the energy that results from it. This piece is a prime example of how we see the complicatedness of (re)presenting ourselves.

Decolonization has to do with shifting paradigms, shifting ways of seeing, ways of viewing, and assigning roles to "the other" because of our own stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. Ultimately, it is wrapped up in how we (re)present ourselves and portray others and how we get our students to see themselves and others and the complicatedness of being (re)presented. What picture would you use to represent yourself to others?

Enjoy this edition; many thanks to our reviewers and all of you who share your Praxis with others, all for the good of humankind in the spaces where we teach, learn, and grow.

Gertrude Tinker Sachs

Editor

Ubiquity Praxis

References

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Anchor.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (Ed), *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (pp. 13 – 74). Culture and Identities Series (1st ed). London, UK: The Open University.

Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism.* New York, NY: Random House.

Author Bio: Gertrude Tinker Sachs, Ph.D., is Chair of the Department of Middle and Secondary Education (MSE) of Georgia State University and Associate Professor of ESOL, Language and Literacy. As a critical teacher educator professor, Dr. Tinker Sachs' research focuses on inquiry-oriented local and international teacher professional development through transformative culturally responsive literacy pedagogies in English as a first or additional language in low-income communities.