

Aspiration in the Ruins

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Our current focus is money—**not a bad thing!**—but it can distort our views of success when accountability becomes accounting.

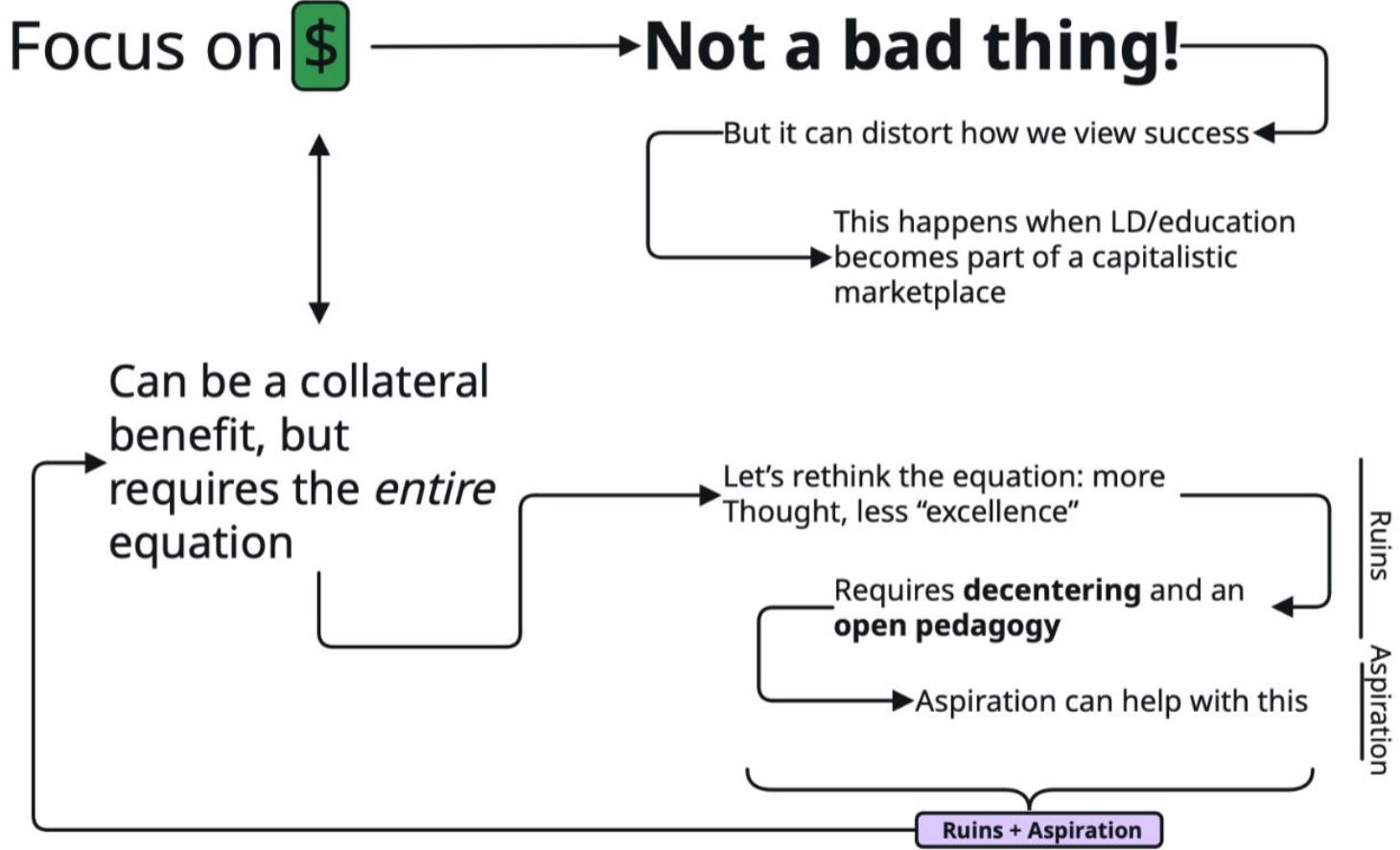
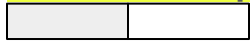
Profit can be a collateral benefit when we attempt to solve for the entire LD equation, not just the money variable.

When education becomes a capitalistic marketplace, artificial goalposts emerge that do not necessarily signal learning success.

We must create a **decentered, open pedagogy** where we think and listen alongside each other.

Aspiration gives us room to be rational without having all the answers ahead of time—something we've all experienced but perhaps never had a name for it.

Combining aspiration and the acknowledgement of the ruins allows for an LD environment that is **open to possibility, and profit!**





What are the ruins?

We're specifically talking about the ruins—the things that *no longer serve their historical function*—of education.

The modern university (~ early 19th century–present) has served to...

- create national subjects to grow culture. (now greatly diminished)
- more recently in conjunction with business methods, create interest in “excellence.” (now greatly increased)

Today, corporate education has a symbiotic relationship with the university in that it...

- leverages university models built on excellence.

The ruins is an attitude and perspective, not necessarily a physical place, space, or object.



How do we inhabit the ruins?

We inhabit the ruins by existing *where we are*, rejecting the temptation to exalt the past as foundations of modernity and the temptation to enshrine the past as aesthetic objects.

Rather than attempt to regain *what was*, it is a matter of working with what *one has*.

This is incredibly difficult—sometimes impossible—to consistently do in the education space in general, LD space specifically.



Not inhabiting the ruins: Baird Point, Univ. at Buffalo



Object of **Aesthetic** appropriation:

- Attempts to recuperate tradition as an aesthetic sensation of nostalgia
- Next to new, concrete buildings this appears to claim that knowledge is some interaction with tradition.



Not inhabiting the ruins: San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice



Object as **Foundation of Modernity:**

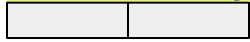
- Attempts to *use* what **was** as foundations of **today**.
- Visualizes (through the use of ancient architecture [~900 BC–100 AD]) the belief that the ruins of the Classical period are the foundation of modernity (like this church built in the late 16th century).



Inhabiting *and* not inhabiting ruin: Coco-Mat Hotel, Athens



This hotel in Athens *seems* to inhabit the ruins by rejecting the temptation to exalt the past as foundations of modernity (the hotel does not use the ruins as the central guide for the hotel's design, for example), but it *does* enshrine the ruins as aesthetic objects by placing them under protective measures and accompanying informational plaques.



What is aspiration?

Emily

- Wants to be a doctor
- Wants to provide the medical assistance whose nature it is the job of her medical education to convey to her
- Knows that she has some understanding of the medical field, but the clearest view will come about by way of engaging in her medical education
- Hopes to satisfy values she does not know she will have later on

Values come from a **future self**

Matt

- Wants to be a doctor
- Wants to make money
- Wants to please parents
- Wants the social status of “doctor”
- Hopes to satisfy values he already has

Values come from the **current self**



What is aspiration?

Emily - **ASPIRING**

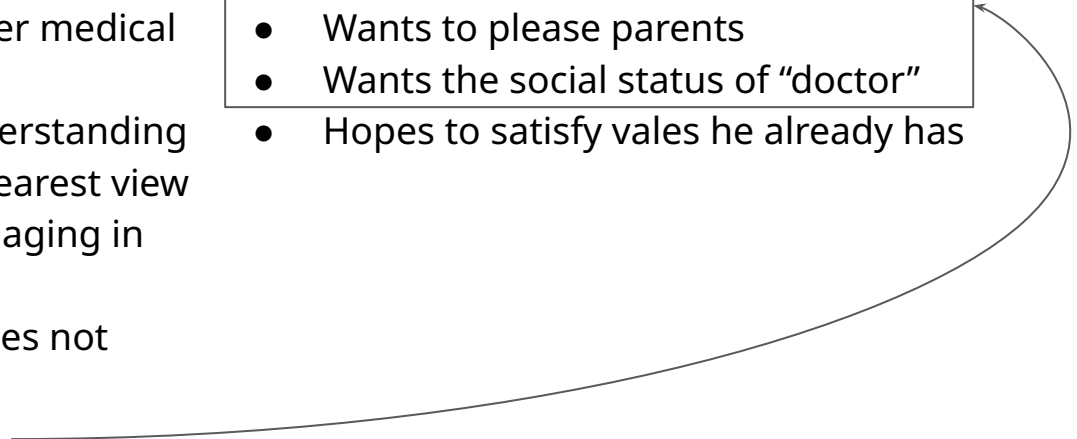
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- Hopes to satisfy values she does not know she will have later on
- Secondary manifestation of...

Values come from a **future self**

Matt - **AMBITIOUS**

- Wants to be a doctor
- Wants to make money
- Wants to please parents
- Wants the social status of "doctor"
- Hopes to satisfy values he already has

Values come from the **current self**





How might we combine aspiration and the ruins?

Consider the meaning of the relationship between LD and its business partner by recognizing the ruins we inhabit.

Investigate with the learners the meaning of the class, which may or may not change from session to session.

Recognize and promote aspiration in our classrooms.

Two Main Ideas

Two Main Ideas

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Work within the ruins of our systems of learning.

Two Main Ideas

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Fold the philosophical concept of aspiration within these learning systems.

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Why should we focus on these two ideas?

- Our current focus is money—which is **not** a bad thing!
- But, when viewed as the primary function and goal of LD money can become the singular agent that distorts what would be productive learning pathways (and paradoxically, corporate) success.

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What is the “correct” order of focus?

Option A

1. Engaging and empowering employees
2. Because that will generate revenue

Option B

1. Focusing on generating revenue
2. Because then we'll be able to engage and empower employees



What is the “correct” order of focus?

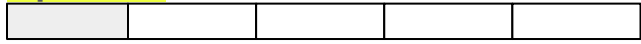
- Option A**
1. Engaging and empowering employees
 2. Because that will generate revenue

- Option B**
1. Focusing on generating revenue
 2. Because then we’ll be able to engage and empower employees

Why not both?

Profit becomes a *collateral benefit*

Hypothetical Equations



Newbauer's retail experience demonstrates collateral benefit

$$x + m = NS$$

NS is...

- Newbauer Success

x is...

- Employee engagement
- Fun
- Customer rapport
- Well-being

m is...

- Money
- Price points
- Products
- Advertising/Marketing

$$x + m = NS$$

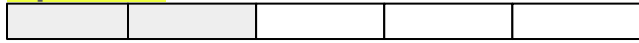
Ideal b/c focusing on both employee engagement and money

$$x = NS - m$$

Exclusively focusing on employee engagement

$$m = NS - x$$

Exclusively focusing on aspects of money



Now, imagine the work we do in LD as an equation:

$$x + m = LD$$

LD is...

- Learning and Development

x is...

- Instructional design
- Content creation
- Delivery methods
- Teaching best practices
- Assessment and evaluation
- Curriculum design
- Employee well-being

All these actions are contained within “*x*” because we measure success in very different ways for each.

m is...

- Money, or the revenue we influence sales/support teams to make

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What happens when we solve for different variables?

$$x + m = LD$$

We can focus on our actions *while also* considering revenue.

$$x = LD - m$$

Even without a focus on m , revenue can still come as a collateral benefit.

$$m = LD - x$$

If we *only* focus on m , we lose sight of our core actions.

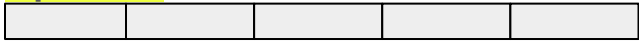
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In abstraction, what does this all mean?

We should **flatten** the hierarchy of our variables, where money has equal weight with all the other actions LD performs.



Why might **flattening** the hierarchy be better than **elevating** the money variable? Here are some negative consequences of the latter.



“It is imperative that the University [LD] respond to the demand for accountability, while at the same time refusing to conduct the debate over the nature of its responsibility solely in terms of the language of accounting[.]”

Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins*, 18.

In other words, Accountability ≠ Accounting.

Put in an LD perspective, Readings highlights the present day insistence of measuring educational success *only* through the language of money, all cleverly embedded within an uncontroversial need for LD to be accountable for our actions.

Negative Consequences

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With our path to simplicity and \$15B in revenue, we define success as a function of revenue.

LD tacitly reflects this revenue-driven perspective when we determine how to hold ourselves accountable for the processes and products we use to pursue educational and training pursuits.



Anything not contributing to the overall goal of making money becomes irrelevant, and as such, assessments are used to evaluate LD in a very narrow, dollars and cents kind of way.

Finding ways to make money is **not bad**, rather it is relegating the measurement of success solely to revenue that is short-sighted.

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When the value of learning increases due to a corresponding increase in revenue, the beginnings of a capitalistic marketplace emerge.

In such a marketplace, we tend to provide more resources and support to high-performing domains and let underachieving areas—in one way or another—disappear.

The organizationally-determined performance indicators merely determine how classes and programs perform in an artificial context and do not accurately reflect the educational projects they represent.

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Artificial contexts creep into our processes and eventually (and falsely) appear to make sense.

Within a performance-driven (revenue-raising) environment, designing curricula with money in mind transforms learning objectives into educationally-empty transactional guarantees.

Such contexts encourages teaching and training for evaluation, since the end result—and how directly connected to capital it may be—is what matters. But are we measuring anything of value if we only concern ourselves with identifying the signal strength to money?

When we begin generalizing and standardizing tests, we reflect more of the organizational interests rather than education in general.

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How do we avoid these consequences? First, acknowledge we're in the *ruins*.

As bleak as it may sound, the ruins is neither a positive or negative place.

- The systems of learning we rely on *no longer serve their historical functions*.
 - Corporate education leverages university models, universities leverage corporate structures.
 - University systems are no longer defined by its creation of culture or state subjects; corporations are no longer defined by national boundaries.
 - Both are bound up together and share an allegiance to a capitalistic, bureaucratic marketplace.
- As such, we must not rebuild what was.
 - The ruins cannot act as a foundation for a modern environment.
 - The ruins cannot be enshrined as aesthetic objects

This is what makes LD a unique education space!

Rather, we should create an **open pedagogy**.

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And step two? Incorporate *aspiration*.

“We care about many things that we once did not care about. **How did that change come about?**”

“The process as a whole exemplifies a distinctive form of **practical rationality**, one not structured by a single moment of intention or decision at its inception; the rationality of the agent I seek to describe changes and indeed solidifies **over time**, as the agent becomes increasingly able to respond to the reasons for action associated with her new values.”

Agnes Callard, *Aspiration*, pp. 2–3.

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Aspiration helps us rationalize fuzzy decisions, and we've all experienced it in some form.

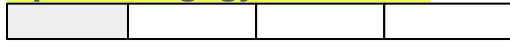
"Someone who tries to make her desires more coherent derives guidance from the self she already has; the aspirant must take her bearings from the self she doesn't have yet." A common example of this is a college freshman choosing their major: they may have an inkling that music is something they want to pursue, but they do not have all the information needed to make what would normally be considered a "rational decision."

Callard calls this "proleptic" reasoning

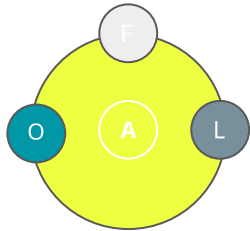
The fuzziness of aspiration sheds light on what Readings suggests as a pragmatic approach to education: an acknowledgement that while we teach in such a way as to be pragmatic, **we might not always be correct in the pragmatic approach we choose.**

Now, how might we create an **open pedagogy** that we'd then fold in aspiration?

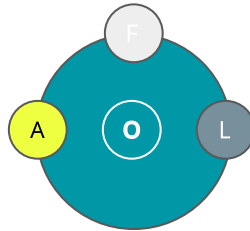
Creating an Open Pedagogy



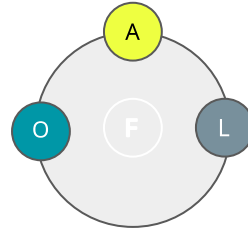
To *decenter* our work we must acknowledge that each “zone” we inhabit assumes it is most important.



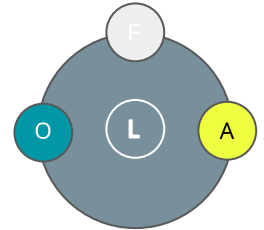
Administration Zone



Organization Zone



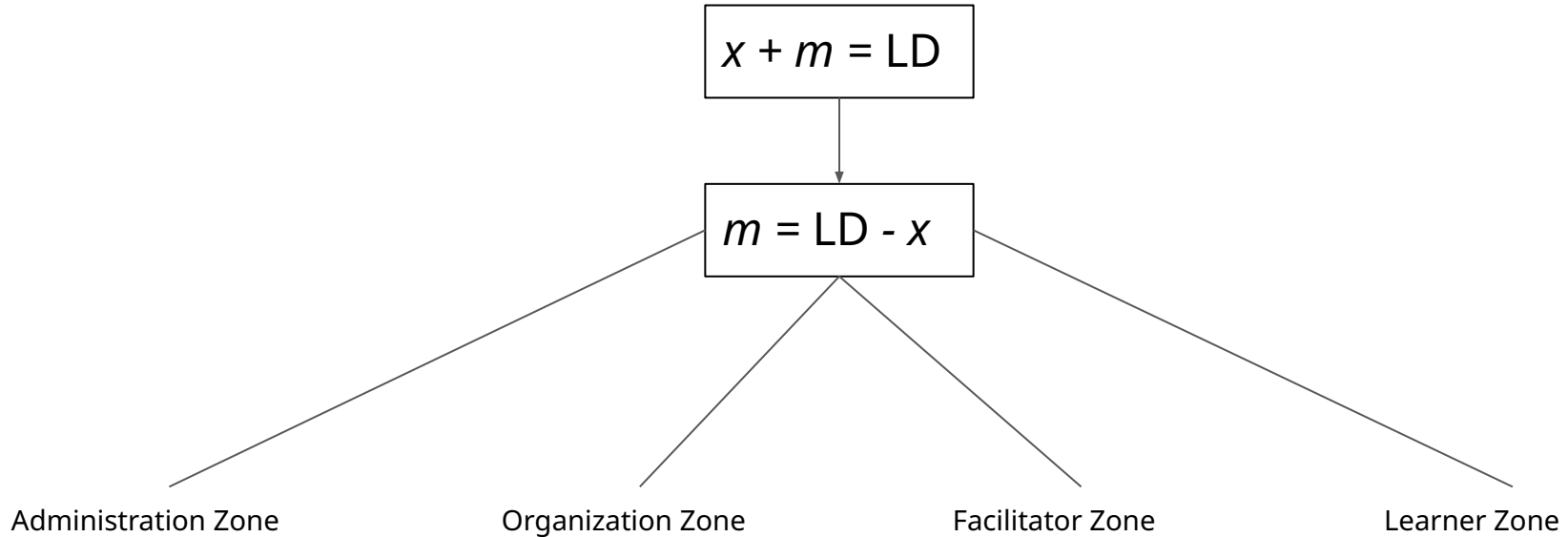
Facilitator Zone



Learner Zone



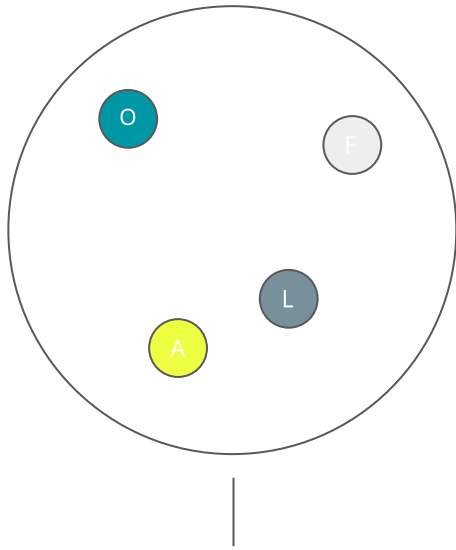
And, at the core of each zone is a focus on money.



When money is the central variable we solve for in all these separate zones, we close down the greater LD equation.



Decentering involves removing the zone as *the* voice of authority so as to include other zones.



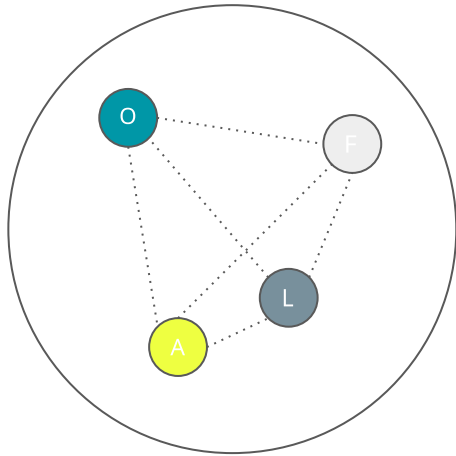
Decentered Facilitator/Administration/Facilitation/Learner Zone

If this is a decentered **facilitator zone**...

- We detach LD from antiquated unidirectional teaching/training.
- We acknowledge the privileged voice of LD.
- We become more transparent about our *reliant* (of SMEs, of learners, of administrative powers, or organizational structures, etc.) status of teaching/training.
- No zones are central!



Decentering encourages every zone to think and listen alongside each other.



Decentered Facilitator/Administration/Facilitation/Learner Zone

Without decentering, we are replicating our knowledge within others under the banner of learner independence and self-sufficiency.

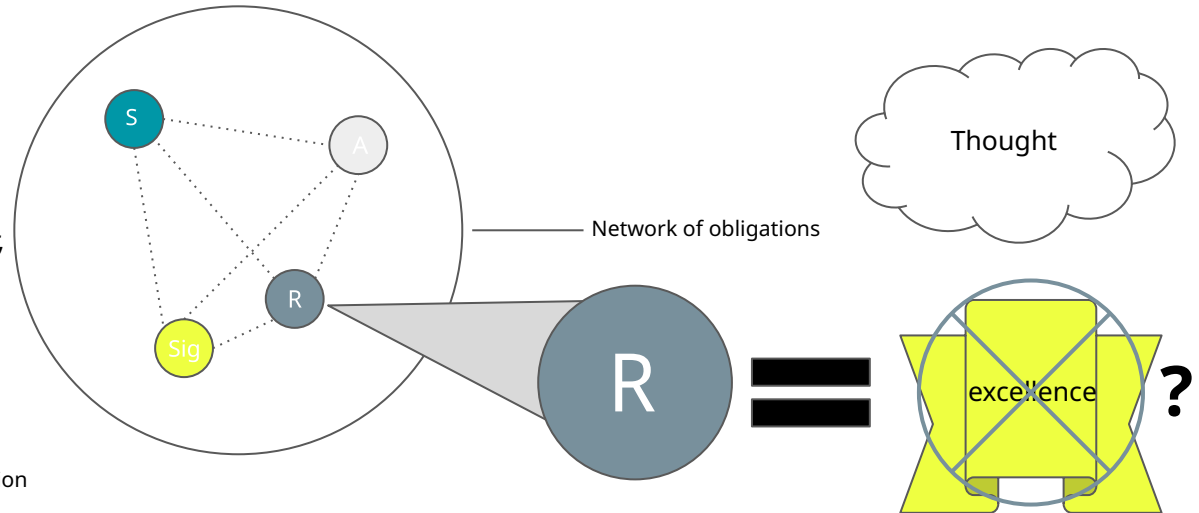


Paradoxically, this means we ask our learners to do *less* thinking and *less* listening. We are not asking enough of our learners nor ourselves in the greater project of teaching and training.

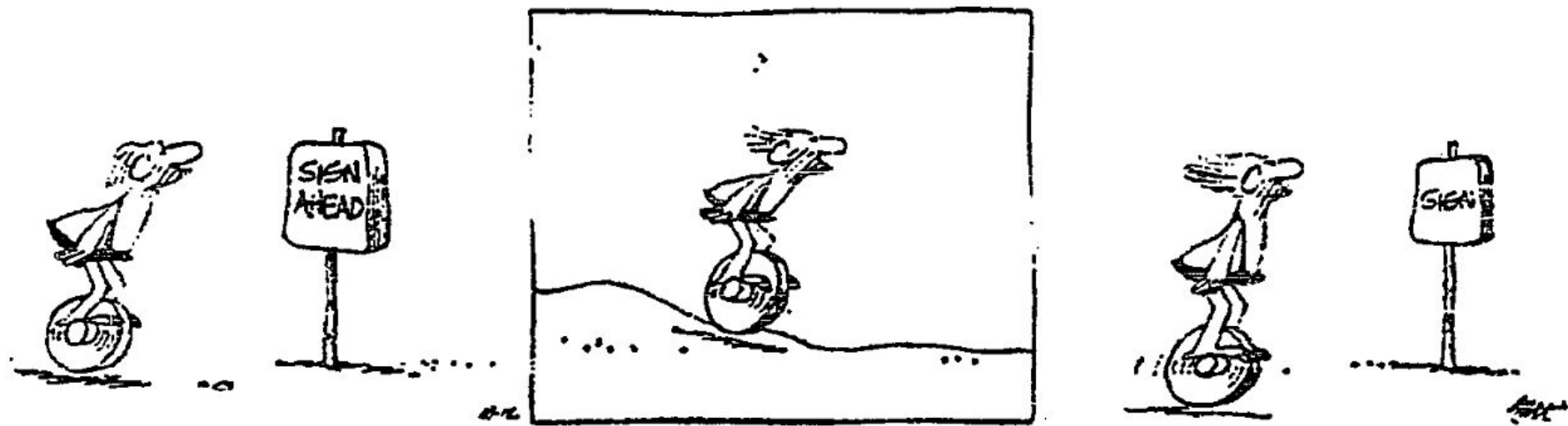
We must *rethink* the idea of Thought, but how and why?

We need to develop what Bill Readings calls a *network of obligations* which, alongside decentering, creates an open pedagogy and a refreshed goal of **Thought**, replacing **excellence**. Excellence is an empty idea whereas Thought is an empty name: we all agree on the need for excellence, but it is not a “fixed standard of judgment but a qualifier whose meaning is fixed in relation to something else.” (23)

This network consists of four elements from the world of linguistics and semiotics: sender, addressee, referent, and signification.



S = Sender; A = Addressee; R = Referent; Sig = Signification

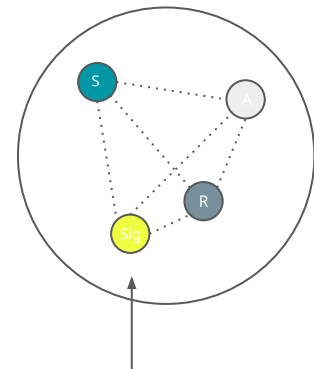


Histoire de la sémiologie.



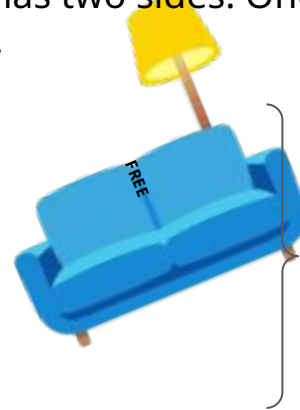
An all-too-simplistic semiotics refresher

In semiotics, a “sign” has two parts just like a sheet of paper has two sides. One part of the sign is the **signifier** and the other is the **signified**.



The **referent**, the thing to which the sign points or “stands for,” is the couch; it’s what the signifier is “all about.”

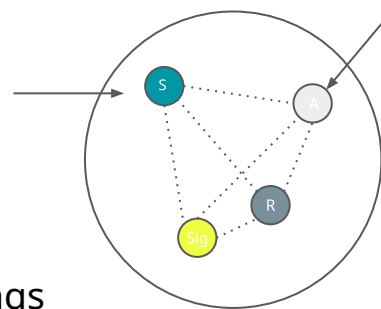
FREE



Following through and taking the couch for free is **signification**: the meaning or relationship between the signifier and the signified

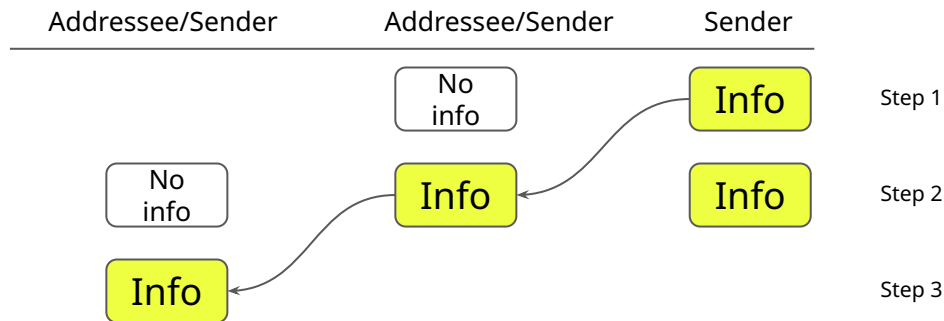
The **signifier is perceptible** like the word “Free” written on a piece of paper attached to a couch at a garage sale.

The **signified is imperceptible**, a concept only in our minds; we know that we can take the couch without offering payment because the idea of free exists in such a way that this behavior is allowed.



An all-too-simplistic semiotics refresher

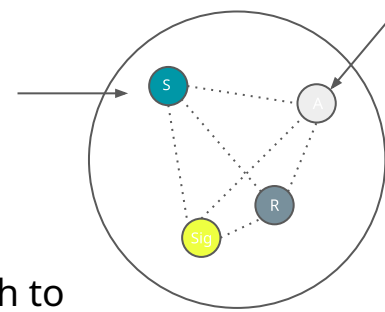
Besides signification and the referent, there are two other elements in Readings network of obligations: *updated* versions of the **sender** and **addressee**.



This POV comes from Ferdinand Saussure (1857–1913) and implies that the communication of the sender and addressee takes place between someone who has knowledge and speaks to someone who has no knowledge and listens.

But as Readings says, **the listener is not an empty head!**

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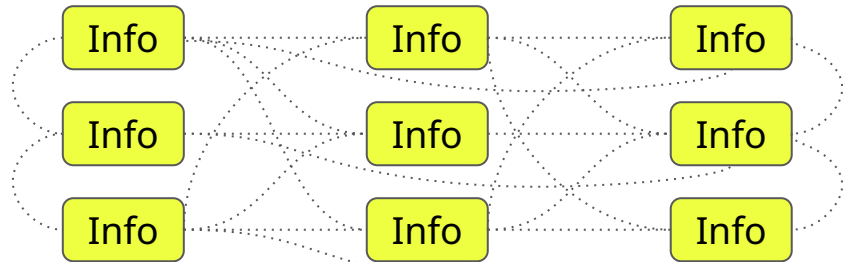


An all-too-simplistic semiotics refresher

We should turn to something more **dialogic**, where education and training thrives in complicated and complex relationships, flexible and durable enough to withstand confrontation, disagreement, and bound with respect toward each other. For “we never know for whom our words may speak.” (Readings)



Addressee/Sender Addressee/Sender Addressee/Sender

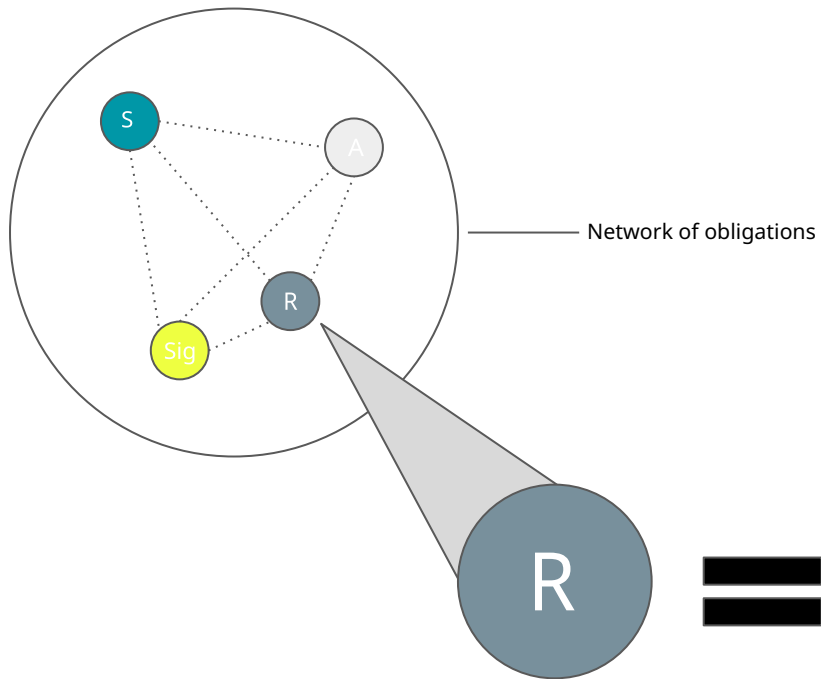


Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1895–1975) literary theory described dialogism as:

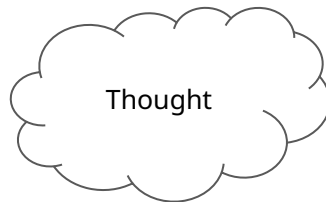
“[I]t is not a mute, wordless creature that receives such an utterance [or input of teaching] but a human being full of inner words. All his experiences—his so-called apperceptive background—exist encoded in his inner speech, and only to that extent do they come into contact with speech received from the outside. Word comes into contact with word.”



Semiotics and Thought: bringing it all together



If we've done what was described in the previous slides, we can transform our focus to the referent—the thing that is represented in signification—and rethink what Thought can be.



S = Sender; A = Addressee; R = Referent; Sig = Signification



Why is it important to rethink Thought?

Thought can remain open and unanswered.

Unlike excellence, “Thought...does not masquerade as an idea. In place of the simulacrum of an idea is the acknowledged emptiness of Thought that replaces vulgarity with honesty...” (160)

Thought functions as a **question**, not an answer.

Thought cannot be used as an alibi in the same way that the idea of excellence can be used to avoid thinking about what it exactly means.

Since Thought is an empty name, its **signification** will always change. It has no internal truth content.

Is this at all pragmatic? How can we possible think this way in LD?

Yes! But we need to acknowledge that there is no guarantee our particular pragmatic approach is correct.

This ties in with aspiration, where we “sense that there is more out there to value than [we] currently value, and [we] strive to come to see what [we] cannot yet get fully into view.” (5)

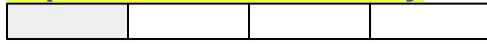
Aspiration



What does it mean to aspire?

“The name I will give to the **rational process** by which we work to care about (or love, or value, or desire...) something new is “aspiration.” Aspiration, as I understand it, is the distinctive form of agency directed at the **acquisition of values**. Though we do not typically come to value simply by deciding to, it is nonetheless true that coming to value can be something the agent does. The explanation of how we come to value, or to see-as-valuable, so many of the things that we once did not is that we work to achieve this result. The aspirant sees that she does not have the values that she would like to have, and therefore seeks to move herself toward a better valuational condition. She **senses that there is more out there to value** than she currently values, and she strives to come to see what she **cannot yet get fully into view.**”

Agnes Callard, *Aspiration*, 4-5.
(emphasis added)



Is it rational to be aspirational? (Yes)

“Standard” way of thinking about rationality

To make a rational decision between two options, a person must know what kind of work is necessary to achieve both options and what option—given the knowledge of the amount of work needed to achieve either task—the person prefers.



In fact, this straightforward definition mirrors Newbauer’s return-on-investment calculations: “Will the benefit I derive from this purchase [or investment] be greater than the cost? How much is this worth to me? Is the trade-off for spending my money on this worth it?” (67)

A person may have **very little** of these calculations, yet the decision made is still rational if they are aspiring.

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Putting aspiration in an LD perspective: SQL

Goal: Create a SQL training program enabling ICs to care more about (or differently) and use better the programming language, than they currently do in their work. In other words, I want “[my learners] to respond to [a technical skill’s] value exactly to the extent that they’re not able to yet.” (69)

Very reasonable objection: How is this any different than taking a SQL class to gain skills to get a higher pay or a promotion?



Putting aspiration in an LD perspective: SQL (cont.)

Three imaginary types of learners:

Imaginary Learner	Goal	Motivation
Imaginary Learner 1	SQL QRT	Passing Grade
Imaginary Learner 2	SQL	Coffee/Snacks
Imaginary Learner 3	SQL	Aspiration

NB: This is not a call to punish learners who do not have aspiration as their motivation!

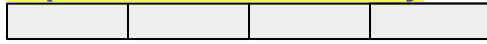
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Putting aspiration in an LD perspective: LOs

Learning objectives help define class constructs and are often described as a kind of “guarantee” of what the learner will gain from the course.

It does not necessarily follow, however, that knowing what will be learned or acquired ahead of time is a prerequisite for achieving those objectives, or that the class will at all be a success.

NB: This is not a call to abolish learning objectives!



This is complicated, difficult, and worth the effort.

Aspiration complicates our relationship with time because rather than building *toward* the value we aspire to, we must build *from* it. In other words, aspirants are those who build backwards from the future selves they do not yet inhabit.

“Man is the creature who makes pictures of himself and then comes to resemble the picture.” Iris Murdoch (1919–1999)



“I think the aspirant makes the pictures of himself *in order to* resemble the picture.” Callard 84–85

Thanks!

Aspiration in the Ruins



How might we combine aspiration and the ruins?

Consider the meaning of the relationship between LD and its business partner by recognizing the ruins we inhabit.

Investigate the meaning of the class, which may or may not change from session to session.

Recognize and promote aspiration in our classrooms.

Goal: Revised Learning Objective (LO) demonstrates the instability of “knowing” how to explain the impact of Seismic. It is a necessary but impossible question to fully answer.

Original LO: Explain how Seismic impacts their [the IC’s] work in CSIX.

Revised LO: Discuss the ways that Seismic influences not only your work, but the work of Sales, Customer Success, and your immediate managers. What benefit (if any) does your use (Sales’s use, CS’s use, manager’s use) of Seismic provide to a customer (S–XL customers, international customers, various types of businesses)?

Goal: Revised LO decenters the objective to as many positions possible.

Original LO: Apply and Demonstrate the process of creating and working with Seismic Livedocs and Liveforms in a way beneficial to CSIX.

Revised LO: Apply and Demonstrate the process of creating and working with Seismic Livedocs and Liveforms in multiple ways, including (but not limited to): beneficial to CSIX, not beneficial to CSIX, beneficial to customers looking for extra-detailed pitch decks, beneficial for customers looking for extra-simplified pitch decks, beneficial for CSIX ICs looking to get promoted this quarter, beneficial for CSIX ICs looking to flex programming skills, etc.



Our current focus is money—**not a bad thing!**—but it can distort our views of success when accountability becomes accounting.

Profit can be a collateral benefit when we attempt to solve for the entire LD equation, not just the money variable.

When education becomes a capitalistic marketplace, artificial goalposts emerge that do not necessarily signal learning success.

We must create a **decentered, open pedagogy** where we think and listen alongside each other.

Aspiration gives us room to be rational without having all the answers ahead of time—something we've all experienced but perhaps never had a name for it.

Combining aspiration and the acknowledgement of the ruins allows for an LD environment that is **open to possibility, and profit!**

Thanks!