

## Commentaries and conversations on Mika Yoshimoto's 'Late-blooming student'

**Editor: Noel Gough**

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### Introduction

*Transnational Curriculum Inquiry (TCI)* is both a site for transnational scholarly conversations and a site for inquiry into the ways that electronic publishing procedures facilitate and/or constrain inclusive knowledge work in global virtual spaces.

One of the ways in which we hope to produce such conversations is by keeping *TCI*'s editorial policies and procedures flexible and refraining from imposing arbitrary standards and styles. For example, *TCI* does not have a fixed publication schedule: articles and book/media reviews will be published as soon as they are accepted for publication. Each issue will normally consist of one article or one book/media review but (as was the case in volume 1, issue 1), articles that we believe might be complementary will be reviewed together and, if accepted, published as a single issue. We will also be flexible in matters of layout and style. If authors go to the trouble of formatting their articles in a particular way then we will not change them to fit our templates. Similarly, we do not prescribe one single citation style. Authors are free to use whatever style they see as most appropriate for their work, provided that they use a style consistently and provide all of the bibliographic information we require.

*TCI*'s review policies and procedures will also be flexible. For example, although all articles published in *TCI* will be peer reviewed, they will not necessarily be 'blind' reviews. Authors may choose to anonymise their manuscripts, and the editors will respect their choice, but we will not impose anonymity on authors.

Each manuscript is normally reviewed by at least three referees, two of whom, in most circumstances, will be of different nationalities from the author(s) and from each other. In addition, the Editor may assign a consulting editor to liaise with the referees and the Editor in reaching a decision about publication (in this issue I have taken this role myself). Each referee's signed review will be circulated to the other referees. My experience, like that of many other journal editors, is that signed reviews are generally of a higher quality than unsigned reviews. However, the names of referees will not be divulged to authors of rejected manuscripts. At the Editor's discretion, manuscripts accepted for publication may be published together with some or all of the referees' reports and the author's response, as is the case in this issue.

The major difference between Yoshimoto's submitted paper and the published version is her addition of an autobiographical entry and "A lingering note".

I wish to thank Mika Yoshimoto for her patience, and also thank Susan Talburt, Yen Yen Woo, and Sumiko Nishizawa for their thoughtful and engaging commentaries and questions.

LATE-BLOOMING STUDENT, ROOTS OF LONELINESS RUN DEEP, AS I RETURN HOME  
Mika Yoshimoto

Reviewed by Susan Talburt  
Georgia State University, USA

This is an enjoyable, at times provocative, evocation of transnational cosmopolitanism that moves within and across locations. It depicts both comfort and discomfort with the familiar and the different, as well as their relations. To offer an experiential response, the manuscript brought me to think not only of my own languages, in-betweens, insides, and outsides, but also of short stories and essays, ranging from Pico Iyer's *The Global Soul* to the short stories of Mary Yukari Waters and to the novels of Ishiguro. By taking curriculum theorists calls for a sort of *currere* into the context of transnational living, the author dramatizes significant questions about contact, context, language, and the everyday. A strength of the manuscript lies in its reminder to readers of *TCI* to include not only abstract theorizing about postcolonial and transnational contact and globalization but also multiple forms of representation in their teaching and thinking. These forms of representation should include the everyday lived curriculum. Where I find the manuscript less compelling is in what I deem to be its reliance on readers to make educational connections. In other words, in order to have the effect espoused in the abstract of encouraging transnational curriculum to account for the everyday, this manuscript must be read by readers with such a predisposition or in a context that calls for such readings and makes such connections. I add a few specific comments, none major, but, I hope, worthy of consideration:

1. The first part of the manuscript's title, 'Late-blooming student', is somewhat opaque. I learn from the author's abstract that she is not young, or a traditional student, as we say in the US. And I learn from the acknowledgments and author bio (at the end) that the author is a PhD student, but it strikes me that the title shouldn't depend on these locations. Or does the author mean to tell us that she has become of late a student of the everyday?
2. At times the references to writers such as Bakhtin or Derrida flow quite artfully in the writing. At other times, however, they seem forced (e.g. see pp. 7-8, with Ivanič, citing Fairclough et al.) or rote (e.g. p. 12, 'I think of Derrida's argument...' or p. 16 with Derrida and then Keller and hooks). These references are useful guides to inform readers of the languages that constitute the writer's world and should remain in the text. However, at times, they do not flow easily with the text.
3. It is interesting to me that the author does not embed in her manuscript any covertly didactic curricular implications. For example, a reference to curricularists such as Pinar and Aoki (as in the abstract) that might jog readers to think about what prepares or doesn't prepare the author to live across these contexts and contradictions could help to allow this manuscript to make an overt curricular argument (even while done covertly).

REVIEWER

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LATE-BLOOMING STUDENT, ROOTS OF LONELINESS RUN DEEP, AS I RETURN HOME  
Mika Yoshimoto

Reviewed by Yen Yen Joyceln Woo  
Long Island University, New York, USA

Dear Mika,

I enjoyed reading this article very much. The attention that you paid to the practices of everyday life from the perspective of someone who has returned, such as gift-giving and language-usage, reveals a lot about the cultural landscape through which Japanese citizens are educated. There is a lot of rich data in this article about ways in which you feel called to perform the role of a Japanese woman because of your attention to the embodied senses of regret, embarrassment, or anger. This article was also intriguing in its use of Haiku, which in itself conveys the moments quite powerfully.

However, I found presenting the entire article in the form of diary entries with no meta-analysis problematic.

An entry in a diary is written in a moment, in a particular time and place, and remembers that moment. It was difficult for me as a reviewer for a few reasons. First, how do I provide feedback on a diary? How could I, as a reviewer, ask someone to change his/her diary entries? Should diary entries not remain as they are? Second, it appears that there has been some level of rewriting beyond just the translation of the diary entries. For instance, there have been citations added with quotes and page numbers (although citations were not used consistently throughout the article). Yet, there were no indications, in the background section, of the process of editing. I felt that as a reader, I needed you to tell me what was done to the diary entries after they were completed. Were they edited? Were there entries that you chose not to include? Were quotations added later on? Third, using a diary form for the entire article does not seem to allow much space for connecting your observations and thoughts to a broader scholarly context. How have international scholars written about the Japanese curriculum? How does this present account challenge or extend the conversation about curriculum or transnational curriculum inquiry? Fourth, I felt there was not enough analysis to articulate the fresh perspectives you arrived at by your attention to the experiences and knowledge of everyday lives that you describe in the abstract. For instance, what were the threads of inquiry, or questions raised, that you feel would not have been articulated if attention had not been paid to everyday life?

Recommendations for revision:

1. The process of rewriting and editing could be more clearly articulated.
2. Articulate a clearer theoretical framework that emerges from your diary entries. What fresh perspectives did you glean by using your particular approach that you wouldn't have been able to see otherwise?
3. You might wish to consider selecting specific moments from the diary entries for a more in-depth analysis outside of the diary form. In other words, use your diary entries as data rather than the entirety of the article. For instance, the linguistic terms that are used to describe different categories of women, absence of the male equivalents, and the feelings these terms evoke in you, are in themselves rich enough for an article on socio-cultural images of the roles of women.



4. Consider more critically how Canada is represented in your diary entries. You begin the abstract by situating your work as postcolonial, transnational curriculum inquiry yet somehow, while you critique your experience of Japanese practices, the figure of Canada gets presented as unitary and uncomplicated. What does it mean for a transnational to see through a postcolonial lens? How might your experience of Canada be related to your privileged status in a school of higher learning?
5. Consider more critically your use of Western theories/images to describe your own experience. One moment in the entry dated July 10, for instance, was especially jarring. The statement reads: 'If I had become close to them, I cannot be sure how I would have felt, because clearly I am experiencing Vygotsy's (1962) cultural historical theory of psychological development and development of the personality'. This neat capturing of what you are experiencing using Vygotsy's framework seems to contradict your focus on that language which is unspeakable or untranslatable which you mention in your abstract. I think this journal entry is very elucidative in terms of how transnational educational experiences shape and categorize our thinking.

Related literature that you might be interested in reading:

Benedict Anderson talks about the spectre of comparisons in a book by the same name as a feeling of vertigo, where here and there gets mixed up when you are transnational. This is a sense of seeing places and things simultaneously up close up and from afar. *Crafting Selves* by Dorrine Kondo might be useful to you as she uses events of everyday life in a Japanese factory to trouble notions of identity. Dorothy Smith and her work on everyday life as problematic should provide a good articulation of using everyday life to ask questions of a broader cultural-political landscape.

Thoughts/observations that this submission evoked:

This is a very evocative article, and it evoked a few thoughts for me, which might or might not be interesting to you. Reading this together with the article in the inaugural TCI issue by Lixin Luo made me think of the question of what curriculum work means for transnational curriculum scholars. It appears that curriculum work, for those of us who have lived and work within and across different national boundaries, is the re-evaluation of the ways that we have been educated and the communication of our changing perspectives. In both your article and in Luo's article, the story of curriculum work is also the story of discovering new strengths and capacities. I am intrigued by what transnational curriculum work does to transnational women and our understandings of how, when, and what we can speak. Whose voices do we speak through? Who do our heroes become?

Again, I enjoyed reading this very much and think that there is a lot of value in the type of reflection that you have engaged in on your trip back to Japan. I sincerely hope that what you have written here can be developed further into several articles.

With best regards,  
Yen Yen Joyceln Woo

REVIEWER

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LATE-BLOOMING STUDENT, ROOTS OF LONELINESS RUN DEEP, AS I RETURN HOME  
Mika Yoshimoto

Reviewed by Sumiko Nishizawa  
Kwantlen University College, British Columbia, Canada

Yoshimoto's article titled in the form of haiku is an inspirational inquiry into her experience of living between languages and cultures and the struggle for understanding self. As Laurel Richardson writes, *the narrative of the self* is a powerful means of inquiry, inviting readers to experience different events, times and spaces beyond their own. Not only does Yoshimoto provide detailed analysis of aspects of Japanese people and society, but she also helps us appreciate the value of sharing a space with people of different cultures and languages, as she portrays how our values and norms are constructed through social frameworks, and how the values and norms can be shifted when these social frameworks shift. Since I have lived in a similar space between languages and cultures, I am intrigued by how similar our experiences are, even though our social environments are very different. But at the same time, I notice how different life experiences have shaped us to perceive and interpret issues and aspects of the everyday lives of Japanese people differently. Even though Yoshimoto and I are both "insiders," our perspectives and understandings sometimes differ. As interested as I am by her extraordinary journey, however, the purpose of her narrative kept evading my grasp. It seems at times as if she expects the reader to read and interpret a space between words in her haiku and writing. Such ambiguity may be what she intends to portray; nevertheless, I would prefer to see her epistemic stance better articulated.

1. In the abstract, Yoshimoto writes that "post-colonial, transnational curriculum should value the experiences and knowledge of everyday lives," but does not clarify how. Although she portrayed her experiences and thoughts on education, curriculum issues are not discussed fully, and I would like to see how her lived experience of "unspeakable or untranslatable" language can be brought into curriculum. She discusses ideas of thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Vygotsky, but some of her discussions are not developed adequately to convey her points.
2. She occasionally presents her views in rather an essentialist way, which may mislead the reader to perceive Japan and Japanese culture as static. This seems particularly evident in her discussion of the Japanese education system and Japanese women's status. I do not think such generalizations are her intention, as she is aware of her own transformation brought about by living in between spaces and is generally critical of essentialist representations.
  - a. She asks why it is "impossible for Japanese people to break the ice on these taboo topics," but there have been many works of educators and post-colonial scholars dealing with "taboo topics" such as "burakumin" and indigenous peoples in Japan. Changes are happening.
  - b. She is critical of the Japanese education system as being standardized and competitive. While this may be true compared with the North American education system, it is not the whole story. I would like her to give a little more credit to Japanese educators' endeavors to transform education, even during the time I was a school teacher in Japan from 1978 to 1992. Japanese educators have been trying to transform curriculum, providing students with more time to engage in activities they



- are interested in, and nurturing their creativity, and critical thinking skills.
3. She points out crucial issues regarding how values and beliefs are fluid and can be negotiated and transformed when one's language and cultural framework shift. However, she writes about them rather arbitrarily, instead of developing them into more solid argument. Some comments she makes seem contradictory. For example:
    - a. She writes that her son-in-law is becoming more Japanese, and she is becoming more "foreigner." What does she make of this?
    - b. Her views of the generation gap in Japan are contradictory as well. She is disappointed by the young Japanese exchange student she meets on the plane, and yet she feels happy at the way another group of Japanese exchange students handles a delay at the airport. Aren't both experiences the result of intercultural exchanges and shifting cultures and peoples?
    - c. She comments on the older couple who repaired shoes and writes that she is happy "knowing about these old people that live in today's rapidly changing individualistic society." But I sense that this "individualistic society" is in fact what she values, and that in her opinion Japanese society is not changing rapidly enough.
  4. She suggests that living in Canada has helped her think critically, which has provided her with perspectives to analyze Japanese society and culture. She does so by analyzing Japan in contrast with Canadian society and culture, resulting in portraying the two societies as though in binary opposition (e.g. Canada/Japan; Western logic/Oriental thinking; Canadian women/Japanese women). I do not think that was her intention. I also could not help wondering whether any of her experiences in Canadian society and culture had helped her appreciate Japan and Japanese culture.
    - a. For example, she is critical of gift-giving in Japan and values "Christianity's free-gift concept." But Japanese gift-giving is rooted in caring about others, which I think she values. After reading her article, I had the impression that she is completely content being in Canada. I wonder whether her struggle continues here in Canada. Certainly, that has been my case, and because of the fact that I belong to neither here nor there (a kind of homelessness), I have been able to see a third space between cultures and languages. Dwelling in such a third space is the possibility offered by post-colonial and transnational curriculum for which she intends to argue.
    - b. She uses haiku because she cannot convey deep-felt emotions otherwise, yet she criticizes Japanese language as illogical and requiring deconstruction. I think what she wanted to point out is how the meaning of language tends to be understood vertically, and what is required is seeking horizontal possibilities.

#### REVIEWER

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LATE-BLOOMING STUDENT, ROOTS OF LONELINESS RUN DEEP, AS I RETURN HOME  
 A RESPONSE TO THE REVIEWERS' COMMENTS  
 Mika Yoshimoto

I would like to thank those people who spent the time to review my paper and wrote both warm-hearted encouragement and useful criticisms.

First to Susan Talburt, I am really honoured by your comments and would just like to mention that Pico Iyer, Mary Yukari Waters and Kazuo Ishiguro are among my favorite authors. I read much of Iyer's work during my master's thesis. I especially appreciated when you wrote, "These forms of representation should include the everyday lived curriculum." To explain my title, I would refer you to the autobiographical entry I included entitled "A brief autobiography explaining my title". To explain my curricular argument, I have drawn from Pinar and Aoki's words, "A lingering note".

Next, to Yen Yen Joyceln Woo I particularly appreciate your discussion regarding articulating the process of writing that went into my diary. I appreciate the thought-provoking question, "How do I provide feedback on a diary?" because it is something I too thought about. As you said, "An entry in a diary is written in a moment, in a particular time and place, and remembers that moment." For that reason, I didn't change any of my diary entries. I also appreciate your reference to three authors, Benedict Anderson, Dorrine Kondo and Dorothy Smith. I enjoyed your comment, "In both your article and in Luo's article, the story of curriculum work is also the story of discovering new strengths and capacities." In response to your suggestions, I have attempted to better articulate a theoretical framework related to curriculum in "A lingering note".

Finally, thanks to Sumiko Nishizawa whose article "Translating Literature/Transforming Lives: An Exploration of the Third Space" truly opened my eyes to the problem of the unspeakable, untranslatable nature of language. My inability to articulate my situation may have created the impression that I am completely content being in Canada. This, however, is not the case. Therefore, I have attempted to, in "A lingering note" and in my autobiographical notes, more clearly articulate both my epistemic stance and the nature of my existence in Canada and how I feel about it. Among your comments, I particularly enjoyed the following. "Not only does Yoshimoto provide detailed analysis of aspects of Japanese people and society, but she also helps us appreciate the value of sharing a space with people of different cultures and languages, as she portrays how our values and norms are constructed through social frameworks, and how the values and norms can be shifted when these social frameworks shift." Your comment regarding the contradictions in my everyday experiences guided me towards new understanding of my in-between space that is filled with these contradictions. It is my style to embrace these contradictions and ambiguities in my writing as it reflects my in-between space.

