

# AFTERWORD: A CODA

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*Coda*: A passage added to a musical composition for the purpose of bringing it to a conclusion. The tail, a loose part of an animal.

As Bob Gowin (1981) commences his book *Educating*, I begin in midstream—something we all must do when born, both linguistically and otherwise. There is also the mid-stream of mathematics education into which Laurinda and I were near-contemporaneous plungers, and elements of these have come together in *For the Learning of Mathematics*, a specific source and resource upon which I shall remain focused here today. In addition to editorial pages, composed while she was FLM's third editor (2004–2007), Laurinda has published a significant number of pieces in a variety of journals (including in FLM 10(3), 12(2), 19(3), 24(3), 31(2), 34(1), 35(1)), some of which are 'joint-conversational', and many of which have a strong 'I' voice engaging the reader directly, a characteristic of both Laurinda's spoken and written voices, one that I value highly.

In the hundredth FLM issue, Laurinda drew on Lesley Lee's short communication title *The FLM conversation*. Increasingly, I am becoming uncertain both as to what makes something a conversation and, if it is not one, what else it can be (discussion, interview, interrogation, monologue, etc.). I may return shortly to whether or not these are 'conversations' in some conventional sense. And my piece here is possibly viewable as a short, somewhat one-sided, conversation with Laurinda Brown (even though you, Laurinda, appear in the third person).

Laurinda and I met in the UK at some point in the early-to-mid-1980s, I think likely at a day meeting of what was then acronymically called BSPLM (British Society for the Psychology of Learning Mathematics, an early UK offshoot of PME—now called BSRLM, with 'R' for research replacing 'P' for psychology, an appreciable broadening of the earlier significant cognate overlap between psychology and mathematics, and the invisible preposition 'of' changing into 'into'). I do, for instance, remember a substantial conversation and walk to the car park with her at an Open University meeting around 1985. Our paths crossed among other settings, at seminars, meetings and conferences, and through significant, prolonged, joint encounters with Dick Tahta, a profound friend and colleague for us both, Laurinda from 1973 and me from 1979.

Laurinda's first joint-conversational (as well as jointly written) FLM piece was with David Reid—the current FLM editor—in 19(3) in 1999 when I was the editor and is itself an interesting hybrid, in that there are email exchanges interposed with joint (*i.e.* undistinguished) text ('we' voice) outside and around them. The emails are not technically

transcripts, as they were already written, but they are separated both spatially and stylistically from the rest of the article. There is, for me, a slight sense of overhearing (actually 'over-reading', I guess) which feels different from the 'main' text itself, of something more private (willingly) being made public. But there is also the question of shifting voice.

It was the first instance of this I had seen and it caught my attention. Now it connects for me, in an odd way, with Descartes' algebraicising of geometric problems (by staying in the particular, choosing a specific line or lines to connect variables to and once the algebraic formulation has been resolved, interpreting the algebraic result in geometric terms,) as opposed to Euler a century later (who created the Cartesian plane and imposed all geometric problems into it from the outset and who accepted the algebraic solution as the solution). Cart(email)esian pieces use email extracts as data components while Eul(email)erian ones contain nothing but.

Two years later (2001), following the death of David Wheeler, Dick Tahta and I were emailing back and forth to one another a fair bit and we both had noted David R. and Laurinda's earlier article. We decided to create a piece for FLM in some sense echoing it (and at the outset there is an element from a Dick email about possibly moving from personal to public, about making it generic to some extent)[1]. Now, in passing, as I was still the FLM editor then, it somewhat violated a growing convention about the editor of a journal not publishing something while being the editor (though David Wheeler himself had done so in 3(1), in 8(1) and in 13(1), the special issue Dick Tahta had edited), but for me it was a joint piece, at the outset it was in regard to David Wheeler's demise (the focus of the issue) and it was based on email exchanges between Dick and myself. (In the spirit of honesty, we did adjust them somewhat, both in style and order, although Dick did warn me about not shedding too much of the oral aspect of email text.) And it was also, of sorts, a book review—not that FLM publishes them (though see Lee, 1992).

Laurinda and I made a transitional commentary in the jointly edited issue 23(3), which had a similar back-and-forth, turn-taking aspect, too (albeit with line spaces between 'utterances', something I find interesting when re-reading it today, when compared with the large spaces and asterisks demarcating the change in 'speaker' between Dick and me in our *Seeing voices* piece). There were some questions Laurinda asked, but it was not an interview. And in 27(3), when she ended her FLM editing period, she and I had a second 'conversation' (with no line spaces between our turns), where I started by asking her a question as she was about to join me as a former FLM editor. But upon re-reading this, I found that Dick Tahta and parts of an email exchange between him and me also worked his way into Laurinda and my 'conversation'.

I could go on (and on), but think I will end here. This monograph is subtitled ‘on learning’ and I am tempted to add ‘on re-learning’, both in the sense of unlearning, but also in the sense of learning something again, something I once knew, then no longer knew, and now have had it reknewed (*sic*). And, in writing this, I do find myself curious once more about conversation, a word whose etymology apparently includes ‘living among’, ‘familiarity’ and ‘intimacy’.

### A coda to the coda

Two weeks ago, just before Halloween, I sang a concert including Mozart’s *Vespers*, one of which—*Laudate pueri*—by bar 15 has four different lines of the psalm being sung at the same time, without any of them having been sung by another voice part beforehand. (Poor Mozart had some significant musical constraints imposed by his Salzburg Prince Archbishop Hieronymous Colloredo, both orchestral and durational.) Having heard Laurinda sing chorally in Bristol the last time I saw her, this mention is, in large part, for her. But it also reminds me to think whether overlapping speech is actually not just common in ‘real’ conversations (in English, at least), but almost a requirement. And, if so, in what manner and to what degree could arranging a means for overlapping ‘written conversations’ (if that is not, inherently, an oxymoron) might capture a better sense, as opposed, say, to plays, which are written first and then turned into speech. And I find I am still pondering to what extent mathematics classroom speech actually counts as conversation.

But also, just after Halloween, when I was gathering together the various issues of FLM that Laurinda had published in, I came across 27(1), the first issue following Dick Tahta’s death. I was gently astonished to find my copy had gained a black gossamer attachment to its edge, that drifted

along as I removed this issue from between the (many) others. Only then did I re-see the cover, and the adjustment from 13(1) that Laurinda had made.

Halloween is often seen as a place (time) when the air between the physical and spiritual worlds is at the thinnest. Among other things, this dark, tangled, non-thread thread reminded me of how close I still feel to David Wheeler and Dick Tahta (and John Fauvel, the editor of the first special issue of FLM), who are now all dead, as well as to the rest of we former or current editors who (touch wood—and whatever else might be required) are still alive. Long may we all remain so. And this coda of a coda, this tail of a tail, is waving a greeting, Laurinda, to you.

*For the Learning of Mathematics* is coming close to being forty years old (the first issue appeared in 1980). It was and remains significant, as well as distinctive, in the field of mathematics education. And will remain so, I hope, *et nunc et semper*.

### Note

[1] There was also the piece (which the authors termed ‘a dialogue’) by Marcia Ascher and Ubiratan d’Ambrosio in 14(2)—the third and last special issue in David Wheeler’s seventeen years as editor—where they told we readers that they had met face to face, “We taped the conversation and worked from the recording, trying to keep the transcript as close as possible to the original informal style of our talk together” (p. 36). And Bill Barton, strikingly, in his short communication in 23(3) about that article (as a ‘loved’ FLM piece), termed it an ‘interview’.

### References

- Gowin, B. (1981) *Educating*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.  
 Lee, L. (1992) Gender fictions. *For the Learning of Mathematics* 12(1), 28–37.  
 Tahta, D. & Pimm, D. (2001) Seeing voices. *For the Learning of Mathematics* 21(2), 20–25.

