

7 Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackboard

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.¹

The two-level suburban train clanks out of Central Station. Heading away from the city against the inbound swell of commuters, it is not as crowded as the incoming trains, but still I end up standing by the doors. We creak and clatter across several sets of points before finding our track, rattling our way through crowded stations. It is an achingly clear blue morning; the air is chilly, but the sun is starting to warm the day. It is June, which means the start of winter, and the end of the semester just round the corner. Essay marking and clear blue skies. And that end-of-semester exhaustion. It has been another long semester; international conferences in different parts of the world, teaching from 7 to 9 last night, and here I am on a Friday morning, heading off to find a small language school somewhere in the suburbs. I check my bag to see if I remembered to bring the e-mail with the address that I printed out late last night. Like the other 20 or so passengers standing in the space between the doors, I stand still, motionless, while my mind moves quickly, restlessly, thinking of the quandaries this work presents.

The TESOL practicum: watching student teachers perform their lessons. For many of us involved in teacher education, the teaching practicum seems to hold a certain ambivalence: it is hard work; it is disruptive; it involves lots of travelling; it is too time consuming; it demands that we show expertise in a domain from which we are often increasingly distanced in our current work. And yet, it is also a welcome break from offices, meetings, seminars, problems with the printer, furtive corridor conversations; it takes us back to the classrooms where, in moments of unlikely nostalgia, we often seem