

A NEW JOURNAL AND A NEW COLLABORATION

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This journal has been a long time coming. When Julie Garlen and myself began the Curriculum Studies Summer Collaborative (CSSC) we talked about creating a journal as an extension of the Collaborative. But, we were both early in our careers and it felt overwhelming to take on such a project. So, it was put on hold. The idea came back up a few years ago when Marla Morris joined the planning council of the CSSC. She argued, convincingly, that it was necessary to have more outlets for Curriculum scholars to publish their work. Attaching the journal to the Collaborative was a natural fit. We discussed what it might look like and worked together to get the journal started.

One thing we were sure of was that there would be a multimedia component connected to the journal. We wanted to have images, videos, and/or podcasts connected to the articles to reflect a multimodal way of thinking about the world. Out of those discussions we began a podcast called the Curriculum Studies Genealogy Project. We wanted to show that the current generation of scholars linked backwards to the past. What we are able to do in the field today is due to the work that was done by scholars who came before us and mentored us, therefore future scholarship is built on this past. We hope to leave behind

a library of interviews with Curriculum scholars about their intellectual journey so that future scholars can learn about the past. Derrida teaches that the archive is more about the to-come. And so the Genealogy project and this journal is about archiving the future of a field. This journal will showcase scholars from all generations mapping the conversations we are having about the field.

Right as we were getting started, Covid19 emerged and the world turned upside down. The journal was put on hold once again. We regained our bearings and put out a call for proposals to reflect on the year that was in 2020. As we were planning out the details of our own platform, Leila Villaverde helped us publish this first issue with the *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*. While working through the editing stages together, Covid made itself intimately present. Elizabeth Baker, an assistant editor and doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at UNCG, sadly lost her battle with Covid. Her research focused on mindful living and education. As an experienced high school teacher, she was passionate about shifting the educational experience for students through mindful engagement, thus, this first issue of the journal is dedicated to Elizabeth.

Future editions will be housed at Georgia Southern University and Laura Rychly (Augusta University) and Dana Stachowiak (University of North Carolina at Wilmington) will join as co-editors.

CURRICULUM STUDIES CONCERNS

Beyond just being another outlet for Curriculum scholars, one of the main motivations to do a new journal is out of concern for Curriculum Studies. There are internal and external threats to our field. Most of these threats are ongoing because interdisciplinary fields are always situated in between departments, programs, and disciplines. Our field is based in the humanities and social sciences, yet we exist in schools and colleges of education that are focused on job preparation. We are not recognized as a core humanities program by the university, nor are we recognized as essential to teacher preparation. This in-between status creates a tension that is productive for creativity, and yet, leaves

Curriculum Studies vulnerable to the whims of administrators and politicians.

Throughout my career, I have had to constantly explain Curriculum Studies to those within and without the academy. I have had to defend our worthiness to colleagues and administrators. Other programs in our College of Education have threatened to remove our courses out of their programs and I have had to vigorously argue for the necessity of theory, particularly contemporary theory, in teacher education. While there has been some success and compromise, I have often received whispered support to only be disappointed when votes are taken. External pressures from accrediting agencies and internal politics can often leave theoretical considerations of education out. Curriculum Studies is often seen as strange, enigmatic, threatening, and disposable within colleges and schools of education. Outside the education hallways, it is often confused with Curriculum and Instruction, thus, it is assumed that it focuses on direct classroom practice. To clarify this confusion, I'll often make a parallel between Media Studies and Curriculum Studies. Media Studies is rarely confused with media production, in the same way that Curriculum Studies isn't about curriculum design. For some reason, exploring teaching and learning as a text that reflects values and commitments seems more difficult to grasp. Since all fields rely on the recognition of legitimacy by the larger academic structure, we are constantly under threat. It's a precarious position. Especially when the current incarnation of the academy is focused on business models, standardizing administrative processes, and branding. These are *longstanding* threats to our field, but there are also *immediate* threats particular to our political moment.

IMMEDIATE EXTERNAL THREATS

The current political discourses around Critical Race Theory (CRT) in K12 schools and the movement for publishers to control teacher preparation curriculum presents such a threat. Politicians have seized onto CRT and have found it to be an effective way to stoke racial hostilities in certain geographies. Their ignorance of Critical Race Theory isn't important because as Christopher Rufo of the Manhattan Institute has said, the goal is for CRT to represent a multitude of ideas

and turn them “toxic.” Currently, some states are drafting and passing bills trying to frame the discussion of “divisive concepts” in K12 education. The main impact of these bills is that they are written in a particular way to scare teachers from facilitating controversial conversations, and, they give administrators a pretext to intensify control over classroom curriculum. This skewed framing of CRT has already had a creeping impact in undergraduate programs. The same fear and misuse of these bills is replicated in some universities, programs, and units. However, while this has put our work in the crosshairs, it also presents an opportunity to discuss the necessity of our work to a larger audience. With increased scrutiny comes increased interest.

Even prior to these political machinations of CRT, the hyper focus on testing and standardization of curricula have also impacted teacher preparation in undergraduate programs. Pearson’s EDTPA is a clear example of outside forces taking over education curricula in ways that sideline critical discussions. Even the idea of training someone for a job, particularly, a profession that historically closes ranks on what is legitimate knowledge and what is not, threatens the kinds of social theory we hope to share with students. The idea that education is taught as a method to deliver sanctioned bits of data removes the creativity and the joy out of the classroom and the profession. The recent teacher shortage is a direct result of emphasizing data, rote memorization, the poor handling of the pandemic, and the fear of facilitating difficult conversations. Education is a relationship, not a method. Education is a puzzling situation, not a routine. As the path between where we are and where we want to go becomes less clear, we are challenged to articulate a way forward. We hope that the journal can help in this regard.

INTERNAL THREATS

Perhaps because we feel pressured by the outside, these tensions are carried internally. The dark side of constantly trying to define an interdisciplinary field, is that we begin to believe our definitions. While these definitions are not shared across the field, they harden and calcify in ways that can hinder the field’s growth. The strength of being interdisciplinary is that we allow ideas to develop in multiple directions and in surprising ways. The field is intellectually and cul-

turally inclusive. This is particularly helpful when trying to negotiate around, or over, or through the outside forces infringing on our work. Being interdisciplinary allows more ways to think through the obstacles when pressure comes from above. An example of this hardening occurred recently, when I was told by someone in the field that Jewish concerns are not social justice issues. This happened soon after a white supremacist killed 11 people in Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue. After being stunned that someone felt they could define precisely the boundaries of social justice issues, I connected it back to two other ongoing controversies that have been ongoing in the field: one, whether we have a canon or not, and two, whether we, as a field, should create policy statements claiming political commitments. Both controversies are about further defining the field, narrowing the scope, and creating boundaries around what is and what is not Curriculum Studies.

These two controversies come from different sources. The desire to create a canon seems to come from a sense that we need to mitigate the ongoing threats to the field I described above. A canon might provide legitimation of the field and others can get a broad sense of our importance. It is a genuine problem that not many people read curriculum theorists, or even, know they are reading a curriculum theorist when they do. Even those who work in curriculum theory, often look to other disciplines for sources: philosophy, sociology, media studies, political science, and history, to name a few. Clearly, it is a strength to read broadly, but it is also a threat when our own work doesn't circulate as it should. The call for an official canon is an attempt to highlight a few key texts that exemplify the importance of the work that we do. It is a way to build an underlying infrastructure for the future. But, it also anathema to the project of the Reconceptualization. At its extreme, it suggests, we have reconceptualized enough and now it's time to define who we are. I think it is important to discuss what are the key texts of the field and the important documents throughout history that show how education practice is always tied to theoretical considerations. Problematically though, a canon desires to make thinkers into saints and ideas into facts. It hardens the ineffable in ways that counter the ongoing project of the Reconceptualization.

Perhaps more controversial is the idea of creating a policy statement that speaks for the field. I sense that this comes from a frustration of our politics and the lack of effective activism. Since the Reconceptualization of the field, education policy in our country has gotten worse, teaching has become an untenable profession and learning is now equated with cramming isolated bits of data. The reality of public schools reflects the darkest visions we have imagined. Coming to grips with this fact is quite humbling. Our work seems to make no difference. Proponents of creating a policy statement argue that we can use our esteem as professors and the power of solidarity to shout enough to influence the public conversations. Proponents might say, “We can’t just sit idly by while children are put through these soul crushing sorting mills!” However, I fear that the reality of a policy statement is that it will have no to little influence on the public conversation, yet, it will be quite powerful as an internal facing document. It will police the boundaries of the field, it will set the terms of legitimate ideas, legitimate research, legitimate politics, and legitimate dispositions. It will define the field, define education, and define justice for us as Curriculum Theorists. As scholars, these ideas should always be radically open-ended. Once we, as a field, settle on a definition of these things, we will no longer be useful. We will be dead. Our field will be “moribund” once again, as Schwab said many decades ago. Who will write the policy statements, based on what criteria, inclusive of whom, and exclusive of whom? And, once written, who will be allowed to challenge these statements inside the field? Will we be left repeating the same ideas, wanting approval of our peers, afraid of crossing boundaries and afraid of contradicting accepted dogma? We certainly live in frightening times with a dystopic future in sight. To me, Curriculum Studies is an attempt to keep a candle lit in dark times. A candle of radical curiosity, openness, empathy, justice, and hope. A candle against groupthink. If we harden our definitions of who we are, we have succumbed to the threats that face us. We will have backed ourselves into an intellectual corner that will render us obsolete.

THE JOURNAL

The good news is that even if Curriculum Studies becomes obsolete, the ideas are not going anywhere. While I am not writing the

obituary of Curriculum Studies, it brings me comfort to know that the essential insights will remain: schools should not reproduce inequalities, reduce children to data, or rewrite history to protect the power of the hegemon. Even if the last Curriculum Studies program is shut down in the United States, these ideas will last. They may be housed in a different arrangement, in a different field, articulated within a different context, or written about with a different language. These ideas will remain and flourish every day that we live with the datafication and standardization of education. That's the good news in the long term.

In the short term, we do not want Curriculum Studies to acquiesce to these external and internal threats. We hope that we can name these threats and face them. This journal in one way that we can respond productively. We hope that it is a place where ideas can be radically alive. We hope this is a place that, in concert with the Collaborative creates a sustainable location for thought, ideas, debate and growth. It's another outlet, another institution, that undergirds Curriculum Studies, and keeps the candle lit of bringing to bear the crucial research we do on the pressing conversations of education and society.

