

*Curriculum Studies at a Crossroad:  
Curating Inclusive and Coherent  
Curriculum Conversations in Canada*

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The most pressing concern that we perceive in the field of curriculum studies—conceived as a conversation—is that the discourse will devolve into a relatively foggy, often obtuse, and exclusive discursive exercise. It threatens to stifle that which it is challenged to maintain: open and interpretive dialogue. In this way, we see curriculum as a social inquiry, not as the subject of inquiry by a select few. Curriculum as conversation entails interpreting into experiences of learning as a means of understanding ourselves within the broader context of life and our relationships with others, with our environment, and with the broader world of ideas, past, present, and future. If curriculum studies is to

flourish, we believe it will only be through an inclusive conversation that enable a complex coherence.

Our aim for this editorial is to consider the future of curriculum studies by articulating threats that mitigate inclusivity and coherence within the field. Accordingly, in this editorial, we briefly identify five threats to the field: (a) jargon, (b) contemporaneity, (c) grandiosity, (d) discursive balkanization, and (e) methodological insufficiency. We assert that these threats have the potential to diminish the coherence and inclusivity of curriculum studies, limiting the health, sustainability, and usefulness of curriculum studies as a progressive educational discipline. We also assert that as we move forward in our discipline we must heed these threats and respond via concerted efforts at inclusive and coherent curricular conversations.

### The Threat of Jargon

The first threat is jargon. Jargon limits understanding and participation of the public within curriculum conversations, cultivating exclusion that threatens new voices and perspectives. As illustrative examples, we draw on several Calls for Editorials (e.g., AAACS, 2012, 2011) distributed to the community of scholars in the curriculum field. We see these Calls as a general threat to the health of curriculum studies, particularly due to the confusion that they evoke. Ellsworth (1989) commented on the abstract and utopian rhetoric that infused the literature of critical pedagogy and asked: *Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering?* Likewise, we ask why these Calls do not feel inclusive? In various instances, the invitation

to participate in a conversation about curriculum is exclusionary because language is the barrier to meaning. The efforts at a conversation—a shared interaction—in this case does the exact opposite of what it intends to do. The conversation becomes insular; or worse, when any and all proposed contribution is welcomed, the complicated conversation becomes fragmented and incoherent.

### The Threat of Contemporaneity

The second threat is what we refer to as the grip of contemporaneity; the locating of contemporary studies in relationship to historical groundings is alarmingly sparse. This threat is symptomatic of a broader trend within curriculum studies, which situates the historical roots of curriculum theorizing strictly within the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Pinar, 2008). It is problematic, we argue, to ignore broader and deeper traditions of curriculum history that extends into antiquity. This threat again contributes to diminished coherence, resulting in fragmented tangents of thought that are tenuously linked, if at all, to previous, notable and useful, theoretical frameworks. Drawing explicit linkages to those that informed our line of thinking becomes important.

History plays a seminal role in our search for meaning in the present, and our hopes and plans for the future depend upon our articulation of past to present and upon our understanding what it means to *be* within the landscape of educational thinking and theorizing. “To understand one’s own situation,” Pinar argues, “requires close attention to its history (2008, p. 142).” This sentiment echoes the work of

Herbert Kliebard (1995), who argues that the history of education enables us to engage more critically with contemporary educational contexts. When curriculum scholars are informed by the past and situate current rhetorical, reformist, and conceptual trends in their historical precedents, they neither revel or exaggerate the benefits of future reform (i.e., neophilia), nor cower in the face of it (i.e., neophobia). Rather, they see the reconfiguration of logic in their own work by relating it to the ongoing conversation in increasingly more connected and coherent ways.

### The Threat of Grandiosity

The third threat relates to the scale and scope of curriculum influence. While curriculum studies can affect significant change at systemic and global levels, the framing of curriculum work and assertions on its potential impact are often grandiose and exaggerated. This distortion in scale and scope overextends its promise for resolving enduring challenges of humanity (i.e., poverty, discrimination, economic collapse, environmental sustainability, war and crisis). To frame curriculum conversations within contexts of larger human conditions is one thing; for example, to consider the value of art in times of crisis (CACS, 2012), or poetics in response to contexts of racism, homophobia, trauma and other difficult conditions (CACS, 2011). However, to propose systemically ameliorating, emancipating, or even liberating through singular curriculum inquiries maybe stretching the entire field's potential scope too thinly. The result of this threat is a frustration in

curriculum studies that it cannot achieve the ends it intends to meet and subsequently is discredited as a useful enterprise.

We see this threat of scale and scope not only pertaining to curriculum scholars but also applicable to other modes of inquiry into education (Erickson, 2013). The current politics of science has forced the need to demonstrate significance of educational research through empirical gains or changes and effects on larger populations (Lather, 2010; Lather & Moss, 2005). This politic misconstrues the value, function, and phenomenon of curriculum as conversation. In our view, it can push curriculum theorizing beyond its reach to tenuous linkages between theories, contexts, and practices, which resembles a less coherent scholarship. In contrast, we argue that to position curriculum work within a sphere of influence that is manageable, realistic, and alterable becomes work worth doing.

### The Threat of Discursive Balkanization

The fourth threat squarely addresses the blurred and disparate boundaries of what (and who) constitute curriculum studies. This concern is not new: “curriculum is a complex endeavor suffering in a permanent discussion both about its theoretical state and the relationship between curriculum theory and curriculum development” (Pacheco, 2012, p. 13). Stemming from Schwab’s (1970) claim that the curriculum field is moribund, scholars have been wrestling with clarifying and defining boundaries for curriculum studies (Jackson, 1992) while at the same time acknowledging the strength of curriculum studies as a

transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, eclectic, ecological, complex, pluralistic, cosmopolitical, worldly enterprise (Pacheco, 2012). The crisscrossing of theories, epistemologies, and methodologies across geographies, technologies, contexts, and vastly diverse groups of people further troubles the boundaries of curriculum studies. As a consequence, curriculum scholars with very different interests engage in immensely different conversations all under the canopy of curriculum studies. Egan (2003) notes that “this dividing up the field of education into many sub-fields, none of which apparently has much that is useful to say to any other, seems to me still to be the curse of the study of education” (p. 18). Egan further questions, “how much longer can we stagger on, producing mountains of ‘knowledge’ that are supposed to improve education, while patently doing nothing of the sort—and in the process earning the contempt of the wider academic world” (p. 18). It seems that the lack of boundaries has led to a factious community of scholars.

### The Threat of Methodological Insufficiency

The fifth, and final, threat we term methodological insufficiency. This threat refers to the recession of methodological rigor during the reconceptualist period in curriculum scholarship. Instead of focusing on the development of rigorous methods, curriculum scholars have prioritized and emphasized the diversification and expansion of theoretical curricular frameworks. While the diversity of frameworks is useful for engaging in complex conversations, the field has largely neglected to refine these frameworks in terms of their methodological

appropriation. Reflecting on Schwab's second sign of crisis, Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003b, p. 427) note, "varied forms of enquiry, including structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism, and post-modernism (to name a few) have been introduced to the field, manifesting a greater commitment to talk about rather than to engage with curriculum endeavors." The result of this neglect is a mistaking of conceptual frameworks for methodological clarity and sufficiency.

In the absence of methodological clarity, the generation of scholarship, knowledge, and curriculum as inquiry becomes a shaky, non-transparent structure, easily discredited. Like the threat of jargon, if others cannot follow our methodological conversation than we not only diminish inclusivity within our conversations but also limit the capacity of curriculum work for greater influence. Methodological insufficiency—characterized by a lack of rigor and transparency—jeopardizes the validity and utility of curriculum research. In calling for methodological sufficiency, we value Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler's (2008) notion that sufficiency-seeking inquiry involves distributed, non-centralized, but connected, scholarship; such work delves into multiple interpretations of local curricular experiences to provoke new conceptions of teaching and learning, while simultaneously considering diverse contexts and theoretical lenses.

Given these five threats, we argue that curriculum scholars must endeavor to promote a more inclusive and coherent conversation amongst themselves but also between themselves and the public—students, parents, teachers, and other educationists. We acknowledge

that open and inclusive conversations may simultaneously challenge coherence. Diverse perspectives are encouraged, however, those perspectives must be connected through a historical and contemporary continuity of curriculum discourse. In this way, we follow Taylor's (1979) notion of coherence, which involves depicting evidences and interpretations that may not solely present as linear arguments but that also maintain dissonance through logical, alternative thinking. As we work to steer the ship of this journal, the conversation that we curate will doubtlessly navigate various and sundry storms. To preserve coherence and inclusivity, we aim for scholarship that addresses and mitigates these five threats. We welcome scholarship that is grounded in the original intention of *conversation*, an inter-communal dialogue that is valuable to educationists in the broadest sense.

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