Beyond 'Presentism'

Re-Imagining the Historical, Personal, and Social Places of Curriculum

James Nahachewsky and
Ingrid Johnston (Eds.)

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INTRODUCTION

> Spaces can be real or imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practices. (hooks, 1992, p. 153)

> The curriculum task becomes the recovery of memory and history in ways that psychologically allow individuals to re-enter politically the public sphere in privately meaningful and ethically committed ways. (Pinar, 2004, pp. 240–241)

In recent years, place and history have emerged as key concepts in the effort to understand curriculum—what "curriculum" contains and what it could possibly signify. Pinar (2004) shows the deep connection of place and history to our own experiences of education and curriculum, and the deep necessity to avoid the condition of what he terms "presentism" by rethinking and reimagining our relationship to place and time. hooks (1992) also privileges the historical spaces of curriculum and pedagogy, suggesting the potential of remembered and imagined stories and histories to interrupt and transform how we live and learn together in today's society. Chambers (1999) points out that memory and history, both individual and collective, are located in particular places. She challenges curricular scholars and educators to write from a sense of place, "to find and write in a curricular language of our own, to seek and create interpretive tools that are our own, and to use all of this to map a topography for Canadian curriculum theory, one that is begun at home but works on behalf of everyone" (p. 11).

Yet curriculum, and its study, are not easily located or mapped in an ever-emergent era/culture of "posts," such as postmodernism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, postfeminism. Societal and educational projects seem to be moving from past to present, unity to fragmentation, representation to a constant deferral of meaning, nationalism to global capitalism, and nature to text (Chambers, 2003). Smith (2003) believes that this can be a time and place of hope for Western societies and education, though. As modernism and its hold on education fluctuates, postmodernism makes possible a "motility of meaning . . . [that] works in favour of a deep relationalism," a possibility that is "relational, ecological, modest, conversational and somewhat mysterious" (p. 35). We need not be blindly submerged in the present—curricular studies should also create spaces to investigate the personal and social past as well as the future. It is this ability to engage in that which is "recollected forward" (Kierkegaard 1983, p. 131) that invites an understanding of the 'historical' and 'places' that inform curriculum theorizing and avoids the entrapment of presentism (Pinar, 2004).

The space of this book strives to expand, rather than contain, the plurality of curricular studies in Canada and throughout North America today. Each of the authors in this book's 12 chapters draws upon diverse personal, social, and geographical experiences to address a shared question of how remembered and imagined cultural histories and places interrupt, and possibly transform, teachers' and students' learning. Interruptions metaphorically open possibilities for seeing what Hershel (1955) calls "the past in the present tense" (p. 211). This book's edited collection of writings encourages educators to think broadly about the potential of historical personal and social places as concrete experience and metaphor to understand curriculum, in part, as the "yet-unnameable-which-is-constantly-proclaiming-itself" (Smith, 2003, p. 53).

Metaphor is used to challenge educational and curricular grand narrative through Blades's, Johnston and Tupper's, Donald's, and Naqvi's chapters. Blades explores how the Old Testament life of Serah—or her song—is an archetype for how the past provides a way to understand curriculum in the present, organized around three interrelated themes: announcing hope, remembering promise, and sharing witness. Johnston and Tupper relate Bakhtin's (1981) idea of "chronotope" to an educational context. Time and place in the school chronotope are synonymous, indicating the placement of self in a social world of particular making in relation to dominant cultural and social influences. The school chronotope thus naturally supports an exploration of the processes of identity formation and the constraints imposed by society on individuals as they grow up. Donald uses concepts of "fort" and "frontier" to reveal a colonial past and the present social/spatial divides that separate Aboriginal peoples and Canadians; how these ideas have deeply influenced the assumptions educators hold about knowledge, classroom culture, subject disciplines, and the purposes of education and schooling. Naqvi focuses on a discourse of how languages can serve as a bridge to create an imaginary space that can provide a present hybrid generation of students with a means to reflect upon identity, roots, and notions of ancestry.

Autobiography, history, and place mix throughout Garramone's, Callaghan's, Nellis's, and Ng-A-Fook's examinations of contradictions in curricular structure and experience. Garramone situates an autobiographical story of working as a tree planter in the clear-cuts of northern Ontario, a summer job for many Canadian youth, within a discussion of how space and place reveals a racial curriculum. Callaghan draws upon Michel Foucault's (1975/1995) notion of surveillance, Antonio Gramsci's (1971) idea of hegemony, as well as her own personal experience within Catholic schools, to illuminate the ways in which homophobia functions as an organizational structure within those schools. The film Farewell Oak Street is a touchstone in Nellis's understanding of his mother's and his own lives in Toronto. His chapter argues that curriculum is inseparable from place and mobilizes a knowledge/place relationship, creating an ethical obligation to these places and to what he calls their "hauntings." Ng-a-Fook's autobiographical writing maps his search for a method of understanding Derrida's curriculum on inhabiting and being inhabited by languages of the "other." Through his autobiographical writing, he demonstrates how reflecting critically on the historical significance of one's past helps to challenge the shadows of White colonialism perpetuated within the spaces of many Canadian classrooms.

In the book's final four chapters, curricular and classroom response to the many challenges and complexities of teaching today are examined. Richardson's chapter examines the degree to which Canadian education, particularly the social studies and history curriculum, plays a role in creating symbolic, internal borders between identity communities in Canada. The chapter reveals the failure of a regional curriculum initiative. Beck inquires into the internationalization of campuses across North America and its accompanying call for the internationalization of curriculum. Hers is a nuanced critique and analysis of internationalization employing concepts of "third space," "contact zones," and "inter" as transformative resistance. De Froy takes up the spatial possibilities offered by certain approaches to understanding in the classroom, and considers how one establishes movement from the periphery to the center of the literacy domain. By listening to struggling adolescents in an alternative high school setting, engagement in critical learning is recast through "imaging" before print is privileged. In the book's final chapter, Nahachewsky and Slomp explore the "sound and fury" of changing perspectives and practices in contemporary literacy education. Through two case studies—one in an online senior high language and literacy course and the other located in the brick and mortar spaces of a senior language and literacy classroom—they examine the emergent challenges educators and students face as they strive to understand what curriculum contains, and what it can possibly signify through a re-imagination of the personal, social, and historical places beyond presentism.

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DAVID BLADES

1. SERAH'S SONG: LESSONS FOR DANCING WITH HISTORY AND CULTURE IN CURRICULUM STUDIES

History presents a beautiful vista—until you begin to traverse the land before you. At that moment, it immediately becomes clear that in certain places you might wish to go the ground is soft, wet, and dangerously unmarked. There is quicksand out there, but you have little advice to guide you, other than to stay on the well-worn, hardened paths that beckon. But we are tired of these routes and rightly suspicious of their destinations. It's those other spaces and places that call to us; it's their promise of discovery and insight into how we came to arrive at our present situation, and what we might do next, that gives us hope, that gives us a pedagogy of the past. Before you have hardly set out, however, it is easy to become bogged down, as I discovered when I set out to learn about my great-grandfather. What remains for my education are fragments already invested in the form and styles of their time, a time I don't live in and can't truly appreciate. There are letters, sure, but the ones written by my great-grandfather focus on different events and people than those written by my great-grandmother. There are pictures and objects. I can look at his tractor—that one-cylinder machine that shook like an out-of-balance washing machine—or try to imagine the dreams and hopes in his face, in those pictures of a face that is disturbingly like mine, only to be distracted and disenchanted by the hunting rifle he is carrying as he tries to live the life of an English country gentleman, whatever that is, in Canada.

Culture loves to dance, like the Dervish movements of intrigue and sophistication that invite breathless participation. Just as you consider what familiar tunes would make for a comfortable engagement, just as you find the courage to step out onto that polished, wooden floor to join in the dance, culture swings by already embraced in the arms of race. The two form a stunning pair. Their intoxicating, compelling waltz calls to us, like the sirens, to join in. But we are still wisely tied to our chairs, fettered by an evolving horror of their movement, and as the evening goes on we become increasingly convinced that if ever there were dancers who should be divorced, it's these two. The night is young, though, and we persist in the hope of having at least one dance with culture, excited by the possibility that if we can only hold our arms in the right positions, our feet will find the ability to learn new steps. But it's a tedious wait, for culture always seems to find new partners: first race, now religion, then economics, and finally, the most beautiful of all, history.

How do we come between these whirling bodies, cut into the dance, and choose a partner with whom we can start our own dance of curriculum studies? Standing at the brink of possibility, it is easy to be entranced by the complexity of the

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movements required, our confidence shattered by the understood and well-appreciated challenge of resisting the seductive flirtations of the spaces and places that culture, dancing with colonial delight, would take us. History is an equally domineering partner, and there are better partners if we want to find new ways to dance, for, all too often, the caretakers of history—and they are everywhere, especially within the machinery of government—have chosen the spaces and places to explore. It's as if, stepping forward to begin the dance, a certain shyness takes over, justified by the haunting of poststructural voices over our shoulders, telling us that the minute we take the hand of culture or history or both the dance is already compromised by a strong partner determined to lead.

As for me, just when shyness was giving way to that kind of paralysis that entertains despair, an odd disjuncture in the form of a footnote appeared in the curriculum of my life. An exploration of a character from the past seemed to offer hope and the possibility of insight into how one can approach the spaces and places of culture and history in curriculum studies—or, at least, some useful dancing lessons.

Recently I learned of an odd reference in that collection of ancient narratives that Jews, Christians, and Muslims call the Bible, a small anomaly that became a mystery that became an education. According to the textual context, the patriarch Jacob had 53 grandsons. In accordance with the ancient patriarchal tradition of listing the names of sons only, the text identifies every one of those 53, but then inexplicably breaks with tradition and names one of Jacob's granddaughters: "Serah[1] the daughter of Asher." Although it is inconceivable that Jacob had only one granddaughter, no others are mentioned. A little research revealed, not surprisingly, that commentators, both ancient and modern, had also noticed this anomaly.

The mystery deepens considerably, for the commentators alerted me to the fact that Serah's name also appears much later in the Bible as the only woman listed by name within the extensive census taken of the Hebrew people who left Egypt (Numbers 26:46; I Chronicles 7:30). There is little doubt that this is the same person since her full name is provided, but this doesn't make sense, at least to our modern mind, for, according to the evidence interpreted by modern archaeology (Unger, 1954), the exodus from Egypt occurred at least 430 years after Jacob took his family there in the first place! Indeed, according to Jewish legend, Serah also appears in several other biblical accounts, intimating that she lived an exceptionally long life, either as a legend or, as the text suggests, a woman who experienced a type of immortality.

Who was this person? Given the considerable discussion about Serah in the *Midrashim*, the stories from the Jewish oral tradition that elaborate biblical accounts, this question seems to have intrigued ancient biblical scholars. These scholars consider Serah, the "living memory" of the descendants of Jacob, a woman blessed or cursed—and there is some debate about this—with a long life that enabled her to serve her people as both witness and repository of wisdom and story. She seems to appear at least three times in the history of her people (Bregman, 1998), each time providing that interruption to the discourses of culture that Heschel (1955) calls "seeing the past in the present tense" (pp. 211–212). Serah's timely voice at each moment seems to enable Jacob's children to "recollect forward," to use Kierkegaard's lovely phrase (Kierkegaard, 1983, pp. 131–132), the hopes and promises of a people in ways that encourage the realization of possibilities. Her subtle, timely enactment offers us lessons today on how those of us committed to understanding curriculum might walk right up to history and culture and ask them to dance. We already know that we should take the lead. What Serah's life offers us, I believe, is advice on *how* we might lead this dance, an intervention characteristic of Serah's life in our own curriculum theorising that reveals how we might invent new steps if we are willing and able to hold our strong, determined partners in new ways.

ANNOUNCING HOPE

We first encounter Serah by way of 16th-century Midrashic writings about Jacob's sons. These men sold their brother Joseph into slavery and then lied to their father, Jacob, telling him that wild beasts had killed his son. It was a loss Jacob never ceased to mourn. Yet the Bible records that Joseph not only survives his enslavement but through a series of events becomes the Minister of Agriculture for Egypt. With poetic irony and justice, Joseph becomes the person his brothers must meet and beg for help during a time of famine.

Returning from their travels with the news that Joseph is alive, the brothers now face a dilemma: How do they break the news to their father? Jacob has a weak heart, and the joyous news that his lost son is alive may be more than he can survive. He also is not known for his understanding temperament: The revelation of his sons' treachery is sure to invoke his considerable wrath. According to the legend, the brothers "decided to employ Asher's daughter, Serah, [to break the news] since she knew how to play the harp in a soothing manner" (Bregman, 1998, p. 4). As legend declares, Serah sat near Jacob while he was in prayer and repeatedly sang, "Joseph my uncle is alive and rules over the land of Egypt." In a moment of deep, personal revelation, Jacob realized that the message of his granddaughter was true. At this point Jacob, reinspired by hope, blesses Serah, saying, "My child, may death never rule over you for you brought my spirit back to life" (p. 4).

As messenger for her undeserving uncles, Serah enters into the history of Jacob's children as one willing and able to announce hope during a time of darkness. This suggests a direction in our calling—to engage in the project of what Pinar (2004) calls the "social and subjective reconstruction" of curriculum (p. 8). In the same way that Pinar offers help without necessarily giving advice, a poststructural strategy we all appreciate, Serah's song offers help by example, in this case in the form of a difficult question: How do we dance with the spaces and places of culture and history in ways that announce hope?

It is certainly easier to dance in the other direction, to explore curriculum theorising by travelling down the familiar pathways of those dark, insidious, offensive practices and beliefs of the past that are always threatening to resurface, albeit camouflaged in clichés that seem to be new. We justifiably recoil at accounts of the lives of Aboriginal children as lived within the residential schools of Canada, the systemic racism and sexism evident in former school textbooks, texts that pretended neutrality, and the science curriculum implemented in prairie schools during the 1930s that encouraged children to grow and use tobacco. There is something almost sexy about these endless dark educational histories and cultural practices, lurid, like the way our eyes are drawn to automobile accidents. And scholarship in these areas lays bare for us how the past and culture continue the dances we see today. This is absolutely important work, essential discovering and deconstruction of the assumptions and givens that rule educational practice today and the origins of these discourses in culture and history.

But Serah sings a new song, invites us to a new dance, a curve in our trajectory that is most difficult to follow, yet also, I believe, most needed. In a quiet voice, her song calls us to embrace hope, to approach history and culture in the *expectation* of finding spaces and places of hope, and then to announce these spaces and places to the world.

Spending some time recently thinking about hope, I find there is much to announce. I find hope in the playful yet poignant poetry of curriculum scholar Carl Leggo. There's an agenda of hope in the works of Ted Aoki in his call to explore those spaces in between the mandated and lived curriculum. There is hope in remembering teachers who profoundly influenced our thinking, wise people who demonstrate that is possible to live, think, and be in the world differently—like my mentor, Terry Carson. There is hope in our schools. I'm thinking of the full-scale model of a humpback whale I recently saw at Strawberry Vale School, and the Grade 5 students who, as we crawled into the belly of this whale, were there to greet us with an informative presentation about these gentle giants, complete with a reminder that we can do more to protect them.

There is hope in history, in the journals and narratives of people and communities who refused to bow to an agenda of intolerance, hatred, and despair. The Dutch Mennonites of 17th-century Europe, for example, refused even on point of death to compromise their belief in the importance of creating living examples of how all humankind can live in peace. I wonder about the hope in the great spiritual traditions of cultures around the world—for example, the thoughtful advice given by the Buddha as he lay dying: Inner harmony is possible as we learn to give into the flow of events but only as we learn the wisdom of when to intervene. And consider the hope found in the languages of the world, those oral and written expressions with delightful sounds that, thank God, cannot be translated into English. There seems to me to be an infinite number of Josephs, alive and well, out there in the world. If we look for them, we will find those hope-full historical and cultural spaces waiting for the announcements of curriculum scholars.

REMEMBERING PROMISE

On his deathbed, Serah's uncle, Joseph, asked his extended family to promise to take his remains out of Egypt so that he might someday be properly buried in the land settled by the descendants of Jacob, Rachael, and Leah. That day arrived 430 years later. But the liberator named Moses faced a problem, for although the promise remained alive in the memory of the Hebrew people, the exact location of Joseph's bones was long since lost. The *Midrashim* asks, "But how did Moses know where Joseph was buried?" and responds with,

> It is said: Serah daughter of Asher, who was of Joseph's generation, was still living. Moses went to her and asked, "Do you know where Joseph is buried?" She replied, "The Egyptians made a metal coffin for him, which they sank into the Nile, in order that its waters might be blessed thereby." (Bialik & Ravnitzky, 1992, p. 70)

The *Midrashim* then goes on to explain how, with Serah's guidance, Moses was able to retrieve the coffin, thereby enabling the descendants of Jacob to fulfil a promise made centuries earlier: restoring Joseph to his family (Bialik & Ravnitzky, 1992, p. 71).

Once again, Serah intervenes to restore relationships in a way that allows movement, in this case the exodus of Jacob's descendants and the fulfilment of the promise they made to Joseph. Serah not only remembered the promise, she acted at the appropriate moment to ensure that this promise was kept.

A few months ago, I had the privilege of seeing a promise kept as 17 students in a First Nations teacher education programme completed the first step of their educational journey: certification as language teachers. Thirty years earlier, the Elders of four nations began the process to save the ancestral languages of their communities through educational programmes, and it was an honour, decades later, to be part of the ceremony, as I recognized that this promise had not been forgotten. After the ceremony, one of the students asked me why my Faculty was willing to spend so much time, so much effort, and so much money on such a small group of students. My answer: "It's a matter of justice," for it's the least we can do to begin to make amends for an imposed education system that put these communities in their situation in the first place.

How many of the spaces and places of history and culture contain promises where curriculum studies can, like Serah, play a role in the fulfilment of past commitments? I think, for example, of the energy and work in the 1960s and 1970s in developing the public awareness of ecology and global systems, those books like *Silent Spring* and the work of Jacques Cousteau that awoke us from our cultural slumber and the naïve assumption that humanity could dump into our aquatic and atmospheric systems whatever we wanted without consequence. The promise of awareness leading to action has not been achieved; take, for example, how the federal government of Canada has followed the lead of the United States, in our case by reneging on the commitment of the previous government to the Kyoto Protocol. Who should remember the promises of industrial countries to clean up their act? How might we, in our examination of the spaces and places of culture—our culture, for example—and our history remind the upcoming generation of voters that we have a promise to keep?

We have buried skeletons to consider as well. In the 1970s a group of curriculum scholars broke with the rather technical approach to change embedded in Ralph Tyler's too popular four-step approach to curriculum change by calling into question the rationality of Tyler's thinking. These reconceptualists were, and still are, an exciting bunch, and their works have enabled a rebirth in curriculum studies that challenged J. J. Schwab's famous diagnosis of the curricular field as moribund. Encouraged and animated by philosophical works in the areas of neo-

Marxism, literary criticism, poststructuralism, deep ecology, and other forms of social criticism, these new scholars have teased education for decades with the promise of significant change in how we think about and enact change in the systems that educate our children. But our collective critique, so cleverly and expertly accomplished, has not been able to realize the promise to actually make a change in the social realities of schooling.

Take senior high school chemistry as a case in point. My frequent visits to schools confirm that there has been absolutely no change in the pedagogy or subject content of this secondary school course since the time, over 2 decades ago, when I taught chemistry, or even when I first took it as a high school student. This is not a case of "if it's not broken, then don't fix it." This course is a direct result of the post-Sputnik reforms in science education that were implemented—and I mean this word in the etymological sense of "being tooled"—into secondary schools by noneducators determined to produce more scientists and engineers. Not only did this social engineering prove to be a disaster of epic proportions as *more* students turned away from studies in science, the course now stands as an immoral waste of time when students could be studying aspects of science that would enable them to be more active, informed, and engaged citizens, say, for example, studies in "environmental chemistry." In curriculum studies we have yet to keep our promise that reconceptualisation will make a difference; our Joseph is still under water. Meanwhile, educational systems continue to go about their absurd business as humanity rushes along a path of self-destruction. It is time for our scholarship to remember the promises of our reconceptualisation, to engage history and culture in conversation as we dance, to move through the curves of spaces and places in search for actions that we can take *now* to enable radical, sustained difference in what we are doing in the name of education so that our children, at least, may have a chance.

SHARING WITNESS

The *Midrashim* reports that in the first century C. E., Rabbi Yochanan ben Zak-kai was one day teaching his students that when the descendants of Jacob crossed the sea of reeds, fleeing the Egyptian army, the waters had parted and the water resembled a wall of bushes just sprouting leaves. The *Midrashim* reports that suddenly,

> A voice came through an open window in the back of the beit midrash [school or house of midrash—a traditional educational setting]: "No. That's not right." All the students turned around and saw an old lady peering through the window. "I am Serah bat Asher. I know what the walls looked like because I was there! They looked like mirrors, mirrors in which every man, woman and child was reflected so it seemed as though even more people crossed there, not only those who were present, but their descendants and the descendants of their descendants!" (Bacher & Broydé, 2002, p. 2).

The Rabbi, in this case, assumed the mantle of authority granted a highly respected teacher claiming, as fact, his account of events, even though there was no possible way that he could have know for certain what the waters looked like. The *Midrashim* notes Serah's correction as a reminder not only of what happened during the event, but also of how eyewitness accounts are critical in helping us understand history and culture, warning us as well to be especially humble in our dance with these partners.

We are called by Serah's example to find witnesses to events, those who can say, "I was there; it was like this . . ." so that our exploration of the spaces and places of curriculum avoids what Bill Pinar calls the entrapment of presentism (Pinar, 2004). We are also called to *be* witnesses ourselves. For example, I have seen tremendous changes in educational technology during my years as an educator. I remember vividly in my teacher education compelling investigations of the mysteries of the 16 mm movie projector and long discussions about our concerns pertaining to the newest technological wonder, the overhead projector. This tool, we felt, introduced danger of a teaching style emphasizing the endless presentation of notes for students to copy. It is important to remember that these conversations centred on how to keep teaching more humane and more invested in personal relationships at a time when machines that threatened to minimalise such connections had begun to appear. We need to bear witness to the relentless march of technology, to listen to Heidegger's warnings that technology is no mere means (Heidegger, 1970), to listen with respectful attention to the voices of those who remember when teaching employed different technologies so that we can appreciate what is gained and what is lost with each invention.

As scholars of curriculum, we are also historians of the present, each of us a living memory of events that we now explain to our children and grandchildren. How can we engage in the reimagination and rethinking of the present, to re-present the present through our curriculum scholarship? For example, George Richardson and I have discovered, while talking with high school students in Japan and Canada, that these school students *already* think as global citizens, ready and willing to interact with their peers internationally (Blades & Richardson, 2006). This discovery surely has implications for how we might imagine history unfolding before us and how we might now act.

But this dance of research is the hardest of all, for we are immersed in our cultural situation and historical development and can hardly step outside to gain the perspective that would make new steps possible. This is why the voices able to bear witness to the recent past, or to cultural and historical experiences in other places and spaces, are so essential to our ability to engage in a scholarship of new imagination. These voices change the music in the middle of our dances with culture and history; they keep us alert to new rhythms and songs. We are called by Serah's example to intervene in teaching as well as to bear witness to what we have seen and learned. I recall, for example, getting to know my Egyptian neighbour while living in student housing. One day as we travelled the bus together, he asked me my opinion of the *Satanic Verses*, which he had just read. I was surprised that he had been reading this book, my reaction exposing some stereotypical views of religiously observant Muslim men that were thoroughly destroyed as I developed a relationship with my neighbour.

Stereotypes and their subsequent dismantling provide amazing opportunities for learning new steps in this dance and, subsequently, testify to new possibilities. I recall meeting the CEO of Imperial Oil and discussing with board members their educational policy and vision of corporate responsibility. I was frankly surprised by their attitude and concerns. I'm not praising this corporation, but I am admitting that my view that such corporations are the true "axis of evil" bent on world domination have suffered a radical setback. I can cite one example: In my quest to have Imperial Oil fund science education in Canada, I ensured that the president of their donations program knew that the funding would go to support programmes in action-related environmental education. The response of the corporation shocked me: They not only encouraged such a plan but also suggested I go further in promoting this sort of activism! The point of my witness to this experience is that I have come to realize that we are all enmeshed in discourses that promote an "us versus them" mentality, an adversarial stance that oversimplifies the issues and neglects to consider possibilities that do exist for responsible corporations, if we can only begin to imagine such an entity. And it is exactly this type of witness, a brave, dangerous, and likely unpopular testimony that is needed if we are to step into the arms of history and culture with the confidence to lead, and not follow, their predetermined patterns.

We don't know what happened to Serah or how her long life unfolded. According to some legends, she perished in a fire in 1133 C.E. Some legends say that she still lives among us. It's the latter possibility that delights me, for I'd love to meet this mysterious woman and ask her to share the wisdom and experience she has acquired from thousands of years of living. Even so, I must remember that Serah offers only one perspective; today, we have the opportunity to share and consider a broad set of voices and views, inspired, I hope, by Serah's dancing lessons: announcing hope, remembering promise, and bearing witness. She challenges us to join in a new dance with history and culture, to lead others into those spaces and places of an educational imagination that enables us to realize new possibilities for education. It is to that never-ending challenge that we now stand up from our chairs, walk across the floor in confidence, and ask either History or Culture, or perhaps both at the same time, to come and dance with us. And as we lead one or both off into a new dance, we can respond to their surprised query, "Where are you taking us?" With a smile of hope, promise and witness, we can say, "It's a surprise."

NOTES

[1] Genesis 46:17; Serah is pronounced "Ser-ach" where the ch is the same as "loch." Her name is an unusual amalgam of two Hebrew words, Sarah, or "princess," and Chai, or "life."

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2. THE CHRONOTOPE OF SCHOOL: STUDENTS NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES IN THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL TIME/SPACE OF AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

RESEARCHING IDENTITIES IN THE CHRONOTOPE OF SCHOOL

In this chapter, we use Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of chronotope to consider how students negotiate identities in the social and cultural time/space of a large urban high school. Bakhtin gives the name chronotope (literally, time-space) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships. He reminds us that all contexts are shaped fundamentally by the kind of time and space that operate within them. His crucial point is that time and space vary in qualities; different social activities and representations of those activities presume different kinds of time and space. In their book on Bakhtin, Morson and Emerson (1990) explained, “In…culture generally, time is always in one way or another historical and biographical, and space is always social; thus the chronotope in culture could be described as a ‘field of historical, biographical and social relations’” (p. 371).

A school chronotope is a specific instance of representation of historical time and human experiences as these occur in a particular historical period and cultural environment. Time and place in the school chronotope are synonymous, indicating the placement of “self” in a social world related to dominant cultural and social influences. We consider this notion of a school chronotope through the lens of a 3-year study that explored the relationships between schooling, spatial practices, and identity formation in a large public high school in Western Canada with an ethno-culturally diverse school population. The study built on previous research that linked curriculum to identity construction. Hwu (1998) explained that “identity formation is subject-positioned, context-situated and discursively-located” (p. 23). Theorists such as Chambers (1999), Hurren (2000), Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995), and Goodson (1998) suggested the importance of “investigating and promoting more contextual and intertextual studies of the process of identity” (Goodson, p. 3). Benko and Strohmayer (1997) showed how space and spatial practices play a constitutive role in the construction of individual and group identities.

In our study, we considered the space of school both as observable space, with measurable and boundable aspects, and as culturally coded space that is “characterized by specific social activities with a culturally given name and image”

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(Shields, 1997, p. 188). We recognized that spatial practices are deeply embedded within curricular practices and that space cannot be separated from the lived experiences of curriculum. While students learn the required curriculum in certain designated spaces, covertly they learn that "certain spaces = certain identities" (Natter, 1997, p. 152).

The study was conducted at a public high school in a Western Canadian city with a growing ethno-culturally diverse school population. At the time of the study, there were approximately 2,200 students in attendance at the school, representing over 60 language groups. Our goals for the study were to further understanding regarding spatial and temporal aspects of educational theory and practice, specifically in the areas of curriculum and identity formation, and to consider how students from a range of ethno-cultural backgrounds are able to negotiate identities in the out-of-classroom spaces of school. We invited students in three Grade 10 social studies classes in the school to participate in the study. These classes ranged across the spectrum of the academic streams offered by the school. In addition, two teachers, an administrator, a counsellor, a secretary, and the school police resource officer agreed to be interviewed about their perceptions of students' spatial practices in the school.

The following methods were used to gather data:

- A survey of participant populations regarding use of school spaces. The survey gathered demographic information about participants and asked respondents to rank-order a list of school spaces from most to least preferred, and most to least frequented. An open-ended question was included, in which students were able to include anecdotal information on school locations that were significant to them, and to provide reasons for the significance.
- Student-produced photos of school spaces. A few student volunteers were provided with digital cameras and invited to take a collection of photos of significant spaces in the school. For ethical reasons, students were asked to take photos with few or no people in them or to blur or obscure the faces.
- Individual interviews with student participants to explore their understandings of the significance of the photos they had taken for negotiating identities in the out-of-classroom spaces of the school.
- Interviews with school staff to provide their perceptions and insights on how students negotiated spatial and temporal relationships in the school.

The data were interpreted in order to draw connections between time, space, and student identities. As part of the interpretive process, we noted how students described and categorized particular school spaces, how spaces were socially coded, and ways in which students accepted or transgressed common spatial practices within the school. We were particularly interested in the reasons students cited for feeling comfortable or uncomfortable in particular out-of-classroom spaces and how they identified certain areas of the school in relation to particular student identities. Our own observations of students' interactions and conversations in the hallways between classes also informed our understandings of spatial practices and ethno-cultural diversity.

OCCUPYING SCHOOL SPACES THROUGH PARTICULAR AFFILIATIONS

Demographic information from the surveys of Grade 10 students revealed the heterogeneous nature of student participants' cultural backgrounds and linguistic affiliations. A number of participants were immigrants from China, India, Vietnam, Thailand, Eastern Europe, and countries in Africa and South America; others were children of immigrants. Many were bilingual or multilingual. In their anecdotal responses to the survey, students articulated their understandings of how school spaces are occupied through specific categories, including social, academic, ethno-cultural, and religious affiliations and gender. The following categories emerged as significant in students' identifications of spatial practices in their school:

- Social identifications. Student respondents categorized themselves and others through particular labels such as "preps," "jocks and cheerleaders," "gangsters," "skaters."
- Academic and social hierarchies. Many of the labels addressed particular hierarchies related to academic standing or social status. These included "geeks," "nerds," "the library group," and "druggies," "smokers," "partiers."
- Gender and sexuality. Several labels referred specifically to gendered identities, for example "hoochies," "the very popular girls," "prissy, all about looks," "rough guys."
- Race and ethnicity. Many students used notions of race or ethnic identity to label others in the schools. The most common designations were: "the Korean group," "the Asians," "the Brown group," "Chinese," "people of Indian background," "racial outcasts."
- Religion. This affiliation, used particularly in relation to "the Mormons," appeared many times as an identity marker in the survey.

In individual interviews, student participants elaborated on how they thought these particular group affiliations developed. They indicated that peer groups were selected for a variety of reasons. These included friendships established in junior high school, religious affiliation, extracurricular interests, and similar circumstances such as being new to the school. Most of the students interviewed in the study observed that there were many ethnically homogeneous and religious peer groupings in the school, but they were unwilling to identify their own affiliations along ethnic, racial, or religious lines. It seemed easier for students to articulate a group identity for others than for themselves. Among their own peer group they could see the individual similarities and differences that created friendships. One student commented,

> I don't know if there's actually a said thing like, you don't hang out with them because they're a different race than you, I mean I'm just naive but I don't think anyone actually thinks about that when they're hanging out with them. Because the Brown group will hang out next to the people of the Asian group.

Staff members at the school were less tentative about identifying student affiliations along racial and religious lines. The school guidance counsellor commented that "cultural ethnic groups tend to kind of hang together." A secretary who had been in the school for many years discussed the changing demographics of the student population; she noted that “certain groups from diverse cultural backgrounds group together during breaks.” Similarly, one of the school administrators suggested,

> You start to see groupings taking place and as the year progresses those groupings get to be more and more solid. . . . a lot of the students have made their friends outside of school . . . either in their community grouping, their church grouping, their cultural grouping, their linguistic grouping. We have between 70 and 80 international students. Many of them come from Korea; that group likes to have their breaks together so they can touch base a bit with the Korean element. . . . We also have a large South Asian population. I mean, that’s their background and they’re all Canadians, they’re all born here but because of their religious affiliations, their family connections, and the like, we have quite large groups coming together that way. . . . you go with people you’re comfortable with.

These friendship groupings in the school appeared to be reinforced through the historical conditions of the school, specifically, physical structures such as lockers and hallways. Lockers as permanent features of school space also served social functions through the process of student locker selection. Lockers were located in hallways throughout the school and groups of students could select lockers together at the start of each school year. Depending upon where these lockers were located, certain hallways became designated as the domain of particular social groupings.

Several students indicated that they frequented certain hallways with other students based upon common ethnic characteristics. For one participant, this meant that he chose to “hang out” in a particular hallway with primarily Chinese or

Korean students. In addition to ethnicity, religion seemed to inform students' spatial practices. Several students identified one hallway in the school as the "Mormon hallway," and this was supported by the comments of staff. The school guidance counsellor stated, "We have a Mormon group which is kind of interesting. We actually have a large population of Mormons in our school. And they kind of have a Mormon hall they staked out . . . and that seems to be their place." Sikhs and Muslims also were identified as distinct religious groups in the school.

SCHOOL SPACES OF COMFORT AND DISCOMFORT

While particular social, ethnic, and religious groupings in the school appeared to inform students' spatial practices, the physicality of certain spaces also emerged as significant. Student-produced images of the school revealed a particular spatial physicality that either attracted students to certain areas of the school or deterred them from spending time there. In discussing their photographs of school spaces, students reflected on their feelings of comfort or discomfort with particular areas. Certain hallways were cited as places of discomfort because they were dark with no natural lighting. One student explained,

> This is a photo up by the automotives hall. That's the hallway there. And it's really dark and loud because of the boiler room and just dark and gross. I just don't like that hallway. It's really dark and it, it's just, like it's really long and the only light is the window on the other end.

In contrast, places of light and colour were frequently photographed as spaces of comfort.

> This one is the library. I took a picture of it because it's really bright and it's really colourful and it's really open and big. I took a picture of the skylight. Because that's the only place in the school really with natural light.

Other areas were designated as places of comfort or discomfort because they were crowded or empty. For example, the cafeteria was described as a pleasant "active" space to spend time:

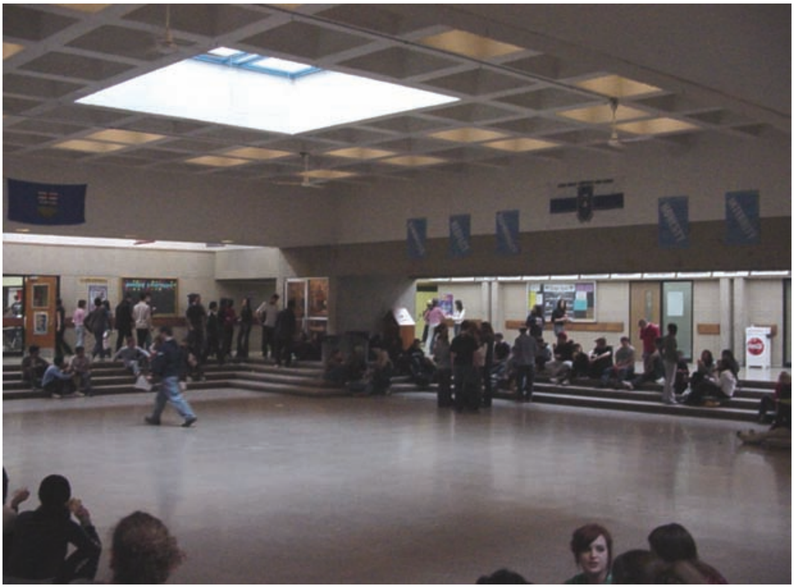
> We have made our cafeteria a nicer place. It used to just be a big empty room with square tables and the like; now we've gone to round tables, put a sound board around the outside so the noise in there is a lot less. And so, that has become a much more pleasant place to be. So at lunch time our cafeteria is very active.

Certain hallways were also identified as places to avoid because they were "crowded and loud" or places where there were "people on phones all the time." Others were described as "hallways and corners where I feel comfortable in and exits that I like."

Gruenewald (2003) reminded us that “places are social constructions filled with ideologies, and the experience of places . . . shapes cultural identities” (p. 5). The students we interviewed spent a great deal of time discussing the relationship between social experience and the experience of place. While many different areas of the school were mentioned as gathering areas for various student groups, the central rotunda was identified by students as the most socially active space in the school. The rotunda appeared to function as a site where students negotiated their social and civic interactions, positioning themselves to see and to be seen and to conduct much of the informal business of school. One student described the rotunda as “just a big open space where everyone gets together.” Another said, “It’s the centre of everything and you can get to any place from there.”

In reflecting on how groups congregate and interact in the rotunda, student participants in the study focused on the hierarchies established by particular groups and on the tensions and unspoken rules that governed how students should behave in this central space. One student commented,

> In the rotunda they all sit around, on the edge and that way you can kind of feel like you can keep an eye on everyone. And you have your own section, whereas if you’re in the middle everyone’s just looking at you. And you’re not looking at everyone else. That’s why doing activities in the rotunda is so hard because you have to get the people into the middle. But then when there is an activity or something, you kind of get the adrenaline to go in the middle and do it.



Another explained,

> I can also see how some people wouldn't feel comfortable in the rotunda. Because there are groups and because going in the middle is so forbidden and some people think, like, if you fall on the stairs you'll be criticized for the rest of your high school career.

The rotunda in the school could be seen as an informal platform for civic participation, reflecting the changing demographics of the larger society and enabling students to "try out" various identifications and affiliations within the safety of their selected groupings. Students considered the rotunda as their own democratic space in which to negotiate a burgeoning sense of citizenship. As Hall, Coffey, and Williamson (1999) suggested, places such as town centres, or in this case the rotunda of the school, "seek to provide young people with the opportunity to establish themselves locally: to make their presence felt and to publicly affirm (collective) identities through the conspicuous occupation of territory" (p. 506). Students' sense of ownership, however, is ambivalent and somewhat illusory. While they have the right to decide on informal rules of group ownership and behaviour, students are still performing within the imperatives of school which sees its role *in loco parentis* as one of control and management. Students have the right to make certain decisions and to perform certain behaviours in the social spaces of the school; at the same time, they operate under a shared responsibility with the administrators and teachers in the school who make the formal rules that govern how students will live within its open spaces.

PERFORMING IDENTITIES "UNDER THE GAZE"

In the *in-between* spaces of school, behaviour is regulated and controlled through a highly complex system of formal and informal rules. Many rules, particularly surrounding the use of space, are often enforced through the strategic use of video surveillance cameras and closed circuit television and through the presence of school resource officers. These themes of surveillance and control surfaced unexpectedly through our conversations with participants. What is most significant is that the themes were more apparent in discussions with school staff members than with students, suggesting that surveillance and control may have become somewhat normalized in the lives of young people.

At several entrances to the school, signs remind both visitors and students that "these premises are monitored by video surveillance cameras." We asked one of the teachers about these signs, and she indicated that indeed there were cameras positioned throughout the school to monitor student behaviour. She seemed to feel that they were effective without being overly obtrusive, that students might easily forget the cameras were there. This teacher indicated that the cameras and closed-circuit television exist as a precautionary measure, not because the behaviour of students was already out of control.

ATTENTION
PREMISES
ARE VIDEO
MONITORED
BY SECURITY
CAMERAS

When we asked one of the school administrators about the surveillance equipment, he suggested that they were intended not to monitor student behaviour but to monitor the behaviour of visitors to the school. Despite this initial assertion, he went on to indicate that the equipment was installed the previous school year and that “it has an impact on the students because I notice they’ll look up and they’ll see that there’s a camera.” He also maintained that these cameras “made all the students aware that they are more accountable for what’s going on in the hallways,” and even though they are used “surprisingly little,” having them in the school “tells the students that they need to be responsible for what they’re doing.”

The students we spoke with expressed little concern for the use of the surveillance equipment. One student commented, “It’s a big school so they might just need those [cameras] to know what’s happening.” When asked if she felt she was being watched, she responded, “No, not really. I’ve never actually thought about them. I sort of just see the sign and I’m like, oh, okay.” Her matter-of-fact attitude towards the cameras was echoed by many of her peers. Pitsula (2003) suggested that “the person who is constantly fixed in the gaze of the supervisor begins to internalize the mechanism of power to which [she] is subjected” (p. 386). Such power, however, can be understood only as relation (Foucault, 1975). The lack of resistance cannot be taken to mean the lack of an ability to resist. We are actively involved in accepting or resisting the normative constraints placed upon us. So our student’s lack of concern does not necessarily denote a lack of agency, nor does it imply that she is not in some way resisting or subverting these constraints. It is possible that while students do not appear concerned about being watched, they may be exerting an ironic or “efficacious resistance” (Katzenstein, 1996) to the surveillance by exaggerating behaviour in view of the camera, or alternatively choosing not to change their behaviour at all as a result of being watched.

Several student participants indicated a degree of self-regulation in their spatial practices as a result of the presence of surveillance cameras. One Grade 11 student told us that at her previous school there had been no signs informing students of the use of cameras for surveillance. She said she was unsure whether there should be signs indicating the presence of cameras. When asked why she thought that, she replied,

> ‘Cause people are going to be careful. I guess that’s a good thing, but I mean they’re going to try and stay out of the way of where the camera’s pointing. If you don’t know there’s a camera then you’ll do it and get caught.

These comments suggest that the students are very aware of the purpose of the surveillance cameras, and while they do not know if they are being observed “at any given moment,” they are “always sure that [they] may be so” (Pitsula, 2001, p. 386).

Another student participant reinforced this notion:

> I heard about [the video cameras] before I came, that they would have cameras at school, but I mean as long as I can go in the washroom without cameras, it doesn’t matter (laughing). I mean it doesn’t really matter to me if

> it’s not people constantly watching you or something. I mean they don’t listen to you. So it’s not that they would hear what you say.

This student articulates a distinction between the “me” that is heard and the “I” that is seen, expressing a distinction between inside (the personal) and outside (related to social, historical, and cultural factors). Lacasa, Del Castillo, and Garcia-Varela (2005) discussed this in the context of identity construction within “specific historical, social and cultural contexts” (p. 287). The student’s comments illustrate how she perceives words to be more important than actions in the spaces of the school—so as long as she is not heard, she is not troubled by being seen. We could argue that this extends to relationships in the school as well: Students are aware that they will be seen and adjust their actions accordingly (as in their occupation of the rotunda) but may not do the same with speech because they perceive it as a more private act.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The role of institutions turns out to be very significant in the negotiating of identities, particularly in relation to two major properties. First, the structure and organization of institutions constrain people to organize their relationships according to particular rules and norms. Second, institutions can be related to the obligations of actors to their own groups (Lacasa et al., 2005, p. 289). In our study, we saw how students negotiated their identities within the physical time-space of the school through particular relationships constructed within categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. While students performed these identities under the gaze of surveillance cameras, administrators, and their peers, they maintained a sense of agency through subtle subversions of the controls they encountered in the school.

We recognize that a school’s out-of-classroom spaces are not monolithic or static; rather, they are dynamic contexts within which social worlds are negotiated and enacted. As Gee (2000) suggested,

> Situations (contexts) do not just exist. Situations are rarely static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment-by-moment through ongoing work. . . . This type of work I will call enactive and recognition work. (p. 191)

School-related discourse is an important means of “discursively producing identity, agency, and power relations” (Leander, 2001, p. 1). Relating such discourse to Bakhtin‘s notion of time-space, we see how “chronotopes are not so much visibly present in activity as they are the ground for activity” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 369). The particular school setting in our study provided a rich time-space context for the production and negotiation of student identities and curricular practices within specific historical, biographical, and social relations. Such identities and practices were never static but constantly being reproduced, renegotiated, and transformed within the social contexts of school places and spaces.

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