This volume examines what and how the media teach, to and by whom, and for what purpose, in a rapidly shifting milieu of media content, platforms, and relations. While intimately concerned with education, authors move the discussion beyond the setting of formal schooling to uncover the ways in which the media contribute to individual and collective understandings of self and other, and their relations to society and communities in which they move. In doing so, the text encourages readers to transcend exclusionary discussions of citizenship to consider participation in local and global geographies against a neoliberal backdrop that marginalizes those unable to, unwilling to, and excluded from competing in the free market. Contributors extend their deliberations back to formal school settings to reaffirm pedagogies that rediscover the reading of texts—broadly defined—in the world through multimodalities. In this sense, the text strives to be transdisciplinary, and is appropriate for use in multiple disciplines and fields of study.
Through a Distorted Lens
CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE: CURRICULUM STUDIES IN ACTION

Volume 15

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Scope

“Curriculum” is an expansive term; it encompasses vast aspects of teaching and learning. Curriculum can be defined as broadly as “the content of schooling in all its forms” (English, Fenwick W., Deciding What to Teach & Test: Developing, Aligning, and Leading the Curriculum. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2010, p. 4), and as narrowly as a lesson plan. Complicating matters is the fact that curricula are often organized to fit particular time frames. The incompatible and overlapping notions that curriculum involves everything that is taught and learned in a particular setting and that this learning occurs in a limited time frame reveal the nuanced complexities of curriculum studies.

Constructing Knowledge provides a forum for systematic reflection on the substance (subject matter, courses, programs of study), purposes, and practices used for bringing about learning in educational settings. Of concern are such fundamental issues as: What should be studied? Why? By whom? In what ways? And in what settings? Reflection upon such issues involves an inter-play among the major components of education: subject matter, learning, teaching, and the larger social, political, and economic contexts, as well as the immediate instructional situation. Historical and autobiographical analyses are central in understanding the contemporary realities of schooling and envisioning how to (re)shape schools to meet the intellectual and social needs of all societal members. Curriculum is a social construction that results from a set of decisions; it is written and enacted and both facets undergo constant change as contexts evolve.

This series aims to extend the professional conversation about curriculum in contemporary educational settings. Curriculum is a designed experience intended to promote learning. Because it is socially constructed, curriculum is subject to all the pressures and complications of the diverse communities that comprise schools and other social contexts in which citizens gain self-understanding.
Through a Distorted Lens

Media as Curricula and Pedagogy in the 21st Century

Edited by

Laura M. Nicosia and Rebecca A. Goldstein
Montclair State University, USA

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This book is the synthesis of hundreds of hours spent in conversation and debate about our current social, educational, and political landscapes. Our desire to affect change in these turbulent times and the months of FaceTime calls and Panera lunches were the impetus for this Distorted Lens project. We thank all the contributors to this volume for both their professional expertise and their long-standing patience in awaiting its completion. We would also like to thank our home institution, Montclair State University, for providing each of us the sabbatical leaves during which we began this and other scholarly projects. Finally, we thank series Editors Brad Porfilio, Julie Gorlewski, and David Gorlewski, who have patiently supported us through family and personal illnesses, and publication delays.

From Laura

I am ever grateful to my children, Jessica and Jake, for giving me those many hours that I needed to research and write. Your love strengthens me—always. Most importantly, and in what does not convey the depth of my gratitude, I bear sincere thanks and enduring love to my best friend and husband, Jim. Your constant love and calming reassurance have been my soul’s support and joy. Thank you for those many hours spent by my side, bending over the paper-strewn dining room table. Thank you for you.

From Rebecca

As with all things, this book landing in your (the reader’s) hands would not have been possible without the professional and personal support from colleagues, students, friends and family. I would like to thank my university friends and allies who have supported me and listened to me while trying to make sense of today’s media landscape and how it shapes people’s understanding of the worlds around them. My family—husband Ari, mom Sandee, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews—have been there with me, as have my four-legged family members. Thanks for all the hugs, kisses, licks, and laughs. They are what continue to get me through the day.
INTRODUCTION

When we first conceived of this project back in 2014, we never could have foreseen the political, economic, and media environment currently confronting the United States and the world-at-large. Donald Trump, celebrity real estate mogul, reality television star, and self-proclaimed billionaire, clinched the 2016 Republican Primary and won the Electoral College vote to become the 45th President of the United States. Even though newly installed President Trump lost the popular vote by more than 2.8 million, he and his surrogates have deluged the media—news, Twitter, Facebook, and other forms—with the false claim that he won by a landslide and has a popular mandate to make real his vision of the United States, and more broadly, the world (Scott, 2017).

Since that fateful night in November, news media journalists and members of the public have engaged in an election post mortem to understand where the media “got it so wrong.” Accusations of media bias, which Trump parlayed into Facebook and Twitter viral memes about the lying (liberal) media, have been bandied about both on and offline. Trump called out newspapers like The New York Times and The Washington Post, and cable news outlets like CNN for what he asserts is false and dishonest reporting, and often employs late night Tweetstorms to get his message of distrust out to the world. He accused the press of failing to leave their silos of power and connectivity with DC political hacks, and of attending too much to the whims and whining of a liberal elite on the coasts. He promised to “drain the swamp” of corrupt politicians and the press who supported them (“Donald J. Trump’s Five-Point Plan for Ethics Reform,” 2016).

In response to their failure to correctly predict the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election, members of the press has scrambled to provide plausible explanations for their failure to correctly call the outcome of the election. They have turned the lens on themselves, citing the failure to adequately engage with and understand the needs, interests, and fears of “middle America,” a largely white working and middle class constituency who rejected the policies, practices, and personhood of the first African American President of the United States (Boykoff & Laschever, 2011; DiMaggio, 2011). Journalists, bloggers, and social media warriors pointed to how the press failed to adequately make a case for Hillary Clinton as a viable candidate because they spent more time focusing on personal attacks, cult of personality, email scandals, and her husband’s past indiscretions and current political influence than on real policy positions and qualifications. Even so, there was little press commentary
or interrogation into the ways in which candidate Trump was able to capitalize on millions of dollars of free campaign advertising and more coverage in news stories both off and online (Patterson, 2016). Perhaps most important is the role they played in putting out negative media coverage in which two arguably unpopular candidates were engaged in a struggle over who controlled what the media messages were and how they were framed. In this regard, the media served as the cultural stage in which the presidential race became a high school popularity contest as opposed to a serious election with real consequences.

And here we are.

The above clearly oversimplifies the nexus of personal and political power relations that play out within and through the media systems that shape much of 21st century life among the global elite who have access to them. For people who live in a connected world, there can be little doubt that how they engage in everyday life has been fundamentally altered by the development of media communications technology. From the first printing of the Gutenberg Bible to the laying of Marconi’s communication cables across the Atlantic Ocean, the rise of radio, television, Internet, and satellite—how people communicate with and come to understand each other—have been shaped by the technologies enabling those communications (Van Dijck, 2013).

Communication technologies like cell phones, tablets, and personal computers have propelled connected humans to become cyborg-like in their interactions with the world (Haraway, 1991). Much of daily life is mediated and remediated with, through, and by these technologies (Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Van Dijck, 2013). People awake in the morning and turn off their alarms, switch over to their favorite social media apps, check their email, and confirm their daily schedule. They experience the world on multiple technological platforms often carrying a phone, a tablet, and a computer or other Internet capable device on their person at all times. People internalize daily sound bites each morning as they watch the news. They not only encounter visual imagery to support news stories, but they also encounter anchor narratives and news outlet kickers across the bottom of the screen that highlight the most pressing issues of the moment. At work they may rely on some sort of media technology to get through the day, whether it’s email, the Cloud where people and companies house their digital information remotely, their cell phones or landlines, and word and data processing applications. Upon returning home, they shift or return their attention to news and entertainment again, turning to YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Hulu, Netflix, and others for access to and distraction from the worlds in which they live. For those who are connected, media are everywhere (Gitlin, 2007).

For many, media are as central to daily life as breathing. Media do not simply inform. They entertain. They connect individuals and groups to each other. They distract a populace, turn their attention away from the real, and enable them to engage with a virtual experience that allows them to set aside the thoughts and activities of the day (Postman, 2006, 2011). Media also serve as sites for and spaces in which people come together to organize and act, to affirm, reject, and transpose
elements of local, national, and global cultures (Bird, 2011; Jenkins, 2004; Sandlin & Milam, 2008).

But the media also distort. They distort points of view, perceptions of reality, and can also spread false information, propaganda, and “alternate facts” (Waldman, 2017). Quite literally, the media can create a reality simply by putting something on record (Bourdieu, 1996).

The ability of the media to shape what their consumers consider to be reality has occurred against a backdrop of media destabilization in which the changes in media production and platforms reflect both a shift in who controls the media and a shift in the role the media play in society. In 1983 more than 50 corporations controlled 90% of the media accessible in the United States. As of 2012, only five corporations control that same 90% and function more as cartels than they do media outlets (Bagdikian, 2014). The impact of such consolidation means that powerful internationally controlled oligopolies largely determine the content, delivery, and means of media production (Jenkins, 2006; McChesney, 2015). Consequently, consumption is also affected, with people experiencing an oversaturation of seemingly varied sources, covering a wide range of issues from multiple viewpoints. People have choice in media sources, that is, they can opt to engage with many perspectives or rely on niche news providers who specialize in very narrow topics or points of view (Dimmick, Chen, & Lee, 2004; Stroud, 2011). Such choice perpetuates an illusion that media communications are expanding when in reality they are contracting and flattening the information landscape.

As a result, the relationship between media and their consumers is based on a false assumption that “individuals possess immediate control; they have control only through assenting to an asymmetrical relationship to various agents who structure the choices in the communicative environment of cyberspace (Bohman, 2004, p. 142). Indeed many would argue that media outlets rely on using spectacle, crisis, and symbolic and institutional violence to capture and retain consumers’ attention (Debord, 1998, 2012; Kellner, 2015). Their purpose is not necessarily to present accurate narratives to inform the public about what’s going on in the world. Rather, the media are profit-driven, and stories that are clicked on provide revenue. Further, media systems like the news no longer simply serve to inform, they are expected to entertain; that is, they have transitioned to the role of infotainment (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001).

The authors in this text take up the media as a site of cultural production, resistance, reproduction, and transformation to uncover the ways in which different media forms function as curricula and pedagogies packaged for and by the public. They strive to extend the reader’s understanding of how media themselves have become a central organizing structure of meaning making and not simply transmitters of value-neutral information between agents of power and the public:

Firstly, the media broaden the natural limits of the capacity for human communication; second, the media replaces social activities and social
institutions; third, in social life the media amalgamates itself with several non-
media activities; and fourth, the actors and organisations of all the sectors of
society bow to the logic of the media. (Shulz, 2004, p. 98)

In other words, mediatization as process and practice is both both curricular and
pedagogical, and all-encompassing. It shapes and reflects both what we learn and
how we will learn it and bounds how we come to understand ourselves and the roles
we play in a mediatized society and a digitized world.

The scholars in this collection communicate the complexities surrounding 21st
century media via the historical and contextual references points found in cultural,
media, literary, and educational studies. They fully embrace the reality that

[Pedagogy is not simply about the social construction of knowledge, values,
and experiences; it is also a performative practice embodied in the lived
interactions among educators, audiences, texts, and institutional formations.
Pedagogy, at its best, implies that learning takes place across a spectrum of
social practices and settings. (Giroux, 2004, p. 61)

In Part One: Probing the Media: Contexts, Theories, and Problems in the 21st
Century, our authors probe and situate the changing roles and modes of media
in the late 20th and 21st centuries. The chapters in this section examine what it
means to be human and the normalization of that definition. The first chapter by
Jim Paul and Susan Beierling critically explores how Western mediations within
an increasingly digitized public pedagogy normalize particular instantiations of
personhood. They highlight how schools and schooling have been and continue to
be a primary institutional sorting apparatus whereby one’s sense of self, otherness,
and worldliness are made, adjusted, and confirmed, even as external media impact
the classroom learning environment. People are sorted, publically and privately, into
categorizations of positive and negative capital goods. As sites of public pedagogy
schools are increasingly saturated by digital tool-technologies, implicit and explicit
mediations of personhood construct individuals as highly connected but mindless
followers – a zombification of one and all (Giroux, 2010, 2011). They consider how
Pinar’s (1975) Method of Currere, might open up these mediated and mediating
public pedagogies to critique, whereby people might develop a critical skepticism of
the sorting mediations that construct cyborg-like, zombie identities.

Julie Gorlewski, Catherine Lalonde, and David Gorlewski grapple with
multimedia representations of educators in the second chapter. They explore the
formation of professional identities in action within the panopticon of contemporary
media through an examination of Undercover Boss, Frontline: The Education of
Michelle Rhee, and Teach: Tony Danza. Employing the practices of critical media
literacy, they reveal hidden curricula grounded in neoliberal ideologies that portray
teachers as powerless pawns subject to the demands of the market and the whims of
boss/celebrities. Teaching is reduced to the false positivism of test scores and profit
metrics with challenges being presented as opportunities to prove worthiness by
INTRODUCTION

overcoming them. The authors challenge the authenticity of meritocracy as a valid and authentic social construct and in doing so highlight how 21st century media images of teaching strip educators of their role as cultural workers. They reject the notion that teachers are mere technicians who overcome obstacles to higher test scores by employing grit and persistence, pluck and spunk by challenging the notion of the neoliberal self, and consider what the hidden curricula of these programs mean for the profession of education.

Sarah Wasserman and Todd Bates return the reader’s attention to the important intersections of self and identity, visual imagery of the media, and constructions of (dis)ability. Their chapter explores how people’s understanding of disability is shaped by their interactions with visual depictions of ‘normalcy’ in advertising. Since the media contribute to individual and collective senses of self and other through the use of imagery unpacking the messages that the media “sell” about normalcy provides valuable insight into critical disability studies. Wasserman and Bates make explicit how visual advertisements define what it means to be “normal” by equating it with being able-bodied. Such images privilege certain physical traits and thus “disable” individuals whose bodies deviate from this perceived norm. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the shifting trend in advertising toward more frequent—albeit still complicated—depictions of disability, and the authors highlight ways that advertisements can become powerful tools to positively depict disability and expand public perceptions of what it means to be normal.

Part Two: Learning to “See” the Curricula and Pedagogy of the Media: Uncovering the Official and the Hidden extends the interrogation of the hidden and unseen in order to frame curricula and pedagogies across a multiplicity of sites and terrains. People who engage with media, regardless of their age, are exposed to messages everywhere, as these chapters illustrate. They watch television serials, post updates to their Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media accounts, attend Hollywood blockbusters in huge numbers, read maps online, and pour over ads in print and digital spaces that are embedded within the media they consume. Each of these sites is sponsored and owned by corporations who purchase ads on the various platforms: commercials for television shows, smart scrolling ads on Twitter, and previews, product placements, and sold posters for movies. Often, educators hear students ask questions about the things they have seen, read, or attended—sensing that something bothers them or their friends. Other times, youths surprise adults with the things they say—unwittingly echoing racist statements made by characters or presidential candidates, espousing opinions as facts because they read it on social media, or taking umbrage at an actor’s casting in a role because of race or gender (while ignoring other characters).

The chapters that comprise this section explore the hermeneutics of mediatized content and make explicit the slippery yet important connections between the visual content of the screen (television, social media, and film) and social engagement in real life, and vice versa. The authors highlight how visual and digital media present opportunities (for those who have access) for different levels and types of social
participation, some of which favour a paradigm shift that privilege the virtual and the individual over the communal and participatory. The first chapter by Kaela Jubas, Dawn Johnston, and Angie Chiang highlight two important aspects of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006), that is, the border crossings of media and the ways in which transnational media can muddy local understandings of important issues. Using *Grey's Anatomy* as a sensitizing artifact, the authors spurred conversations about what people knew about Canadian health care and their sources of information. In doing so they illustrate the connections between contemporary capitalism, popular media, and adult learning.

In the second chapter, Monique Liston emphasizes how social media platforms like Twitter can function as critical safe spaces in which to interrogate media constructions of race. Employing Black Feminist Epistemology as described by Patricia Hill-Collins, Liston discusses how Black Twitter functions as *mbongi*, a third space in which knowledge is created, validated, and/or critiqued. She highlights how such communities of practice operate by relating this space to the popular television program Scandal. She discusses opportunities to recognize the epistemological framework of Black Feminism as a valid knowledge source, illuminating the radical and emergent understandings of a community whose lived experiences and constructions of self are frequently denied authenticity. This hidden yet readily apparent practice is an example of 21st century knowledge that operates beyond normative mainstream narratives.

Like Liston, Laura Nicosia also grapples in her chapter with the contested terrain of racial identities and being by examining the vitriolic debates on Twitter surrounding the movie production of *The Hunger Games*. Nicosia lays bare the ways in which assumptions about whiteness lead to purposive deflections of characters’ racial identities, particularly that of Rue. Twitter users attacked the movie, the director, and the actress, Amandla Stenberg, for her Blackness, even though author Suzanne Collins limned the character as dark skinned and curly haired. Using specific Tweets, Nicosia reveals not only a range of misreadings of the novel, but also a palpable rage against the notion of a Black actress playing the role of an angelic and beautiful heroine. Such misreadings were also reflected in scholarly and journalistic sources that focused on the factual elements of the text and ignored the issues of race endemic to the text, the movie, and the audience. Nicosia reveals a disturbing pattern of veering away from discussions of racial bigotry and invisible Whiteness in favor of less uncomfortable topics and lessons that focus on students’ lack of close reading and their purported weak textual analysis.

The final chapter in this section turns the reader’s attention to the ways in which new media use maps as part of the visual landscape of news reporting. Serina Ann Cinnamon challenges the common sense narrative that maps constitute a technically accurate tool that offer an authoritative and neutral graphic representation of geographic and demographic truth. Instead, she invites readers to engage in employing a critical lens through which to examine maps as socially constructed objects. Cinnamon argues that maps are deployed in specific ways to communicate
INTRODUCTION

and shape ontological notions about space and place. The embedded power/knowledge relations often go uncriticized and unexamined for most people both in media and in educational settings. She discusses how thematic maps communicate ideas about the relationship between space and population distributions that may not be wholly accurate and illustrates these inadequacies with maps used in the 2000 United States presidential election, and highlights how maps can be used as weapons to justify election outcomes and support political agendas. Cinnamon concludes with a discussion about how the spatialization of information deployed on election result maps itself functions as a political act that can highlight or mask elements of oppression by relying on viewer (mis)perceptions about map symbolization and space. Her chapter is particularly relevant given how maps were deployed in gerrymandering and electoral results in the 2016 presidential elections, and highlights important democratic implications for future elections, especially in regard to understanding voting patterns demonstrates and the role of maps as powerful visual communiqués about the political landscape.

Part Three situates and plumbs the interstices of public and educational forums, and explores how the public/cultural/political become transformed within society and classrooms. We entitled this section: Transforming Media Curricula, Pedagogies and the Public because these chapters explicate various visual media and tackle varying perceptions of educational settings. Chapters employ numerous theoretical lenses and methods of discourse analysis to critique and evaluate the messages constructed within and through different media. These chapters uncover how public pedagogies are as powerful, pervasive, effective, and important as those pedagogies practiced and deployed in formal schooling environments. In doing so, they highlight the need to challenge the corporatized, marketized and commodified public pedagogies that enforce a politics of social disempowerment. They further the call to consider how public pedagogies might act as positive ideological forces for social good.

Writers in this section explore how people might interrogate mass and popular media (using humor, fame, satire, and critical pedagogies) to develop ideas of alterity and difference while accepting the existence and validity of their and other viewpoints. The first chapter, penned by Jacqueline Bach, turns the lens back on reality television and the program Teach: Tony Danza. Like Gorlewski, Lalonde, and Gorlewski in Chapter Two, Bach strives to uncover the ways in which reality programming about education function ideologically to construct and reflect particular truth-claims about the topics they cover. Reality television shows, with their claims to represent real-life experiences have been accused of being scripted and therefore not really real, of negatively impacting the business of television because they cost less to produce than other shows, and of depicting extreme examples of human behaviour. Even so, educational researchers and consumers of reality programming must pay attention to how their narrative arcs are constructed, for what purposes, and for whose benefit. Such attention becomes increasingly important as reality television shows assume the role of educating audiences on
topics from looking beautiful to achieving success. Bach introduces the reader to her theorization of reality television pedagogy, and analyzes the complex and often contradictory elements used to construct reality television shows. Using Teach: Tony Danza to uncover the educative/miseducative aspects of such programs, Bach considers the implications of trying to capture the realities of the education profession while relying on a format that encourages viewers to negotiate the real and not real elements that, in a way, ultimately prevents it from capturing the reality it claims to reflect.

Teresa Capetola and Maria Pallota-Chiarolli bring readers back to the formal learning environment to illustrate how different media can be used as curriculum and pedagogy in a tertiary (college or university) educational context. Expanding on the triple entendre of “Let’s Face It,” the authors discuss how students might become critical consumers and producers of media in the pursuit of social justice and the promotion of health. They adopt Anzaldua’s agentic notion of “interface” to explore the necessity and possibility of cultivating intellectual vigilance in challenging, resisting and subverting hegemonic media constructions of identities. The multiple layers of meaning in “Let’s face it” include: reading, facing up to and confronting media, and draw upon critical theoretical frameworks such as discourse and power analysis (Foucault, 1977, 1988), Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2002). Capitola and Pallota-Chirolli engaged students in grappling with issues like youth suicide; violent and sexual crimes against women; and transgender issues as they were constructed within different media contexts. As a result of engaging in the process the authors describe, students showed increased confidence in critiquing dominant media messages; were empowered to post alternative or critical media representations; and displayed evidence of transformative thinking (Mezirow, 2000; Hunt, 2013).

Ashley Boyd and Amy Senta also bring an examination of the curricula and public pedagogy of the media to the formal learning environment. Their chapter illustrates how détournement, a short film consisting of juxtapositions of existing media, can be used in to challenge dominant myths in popular educational discourse. The authors describe how the pairing of clips from contrasting documentaries affected students’ perspectives regarding the Teacher As Savior trope, a common theme in many popular Hollywood movies like Stand and Deliver, Dangerous Minds, and Freedom Writers. They extend their critique to the Guggenheim documentary Waiting for Superman, and discuss how implementing détournement engaged students to shift their views from stances of teacher savior to perspectives on structural responsibility, from reliance on meritocratic ideals to awareness of broader inequity, and from uncritical acceptance of appeal to emotion in media to the articulation of cinematographic choices. The authors conclude that critical interrogation (steeped in a self-study of pedagogical practice) informs efforts in teacher education to draw upon media studies and facilitate critique, and points to the ways in which teacher education
students are implicated in their own constructions of what it means to be a good teacher.

In the final chapter, Jacob W. Greene attends to the power of comedy and satirical programming like Comedy Central’s *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. These two shows, popular among the coveted 18–34 year-old viewing bracket, examine daily news items and issues employing satire to uncover some their contradictions. Colbert’s character, constructed to reflect the views and beliefs of conservative-minded individuals stands in contrast to Jon Stewart’s unapologetic commentary regarding elements of political life. Building off Sophia McClennen’s work in *America According to Colbert: Satire as Public Pedagogy*, Greene emphasizes the importance of humor not only in the canons of style and delivery but in the initial stages of political and social invention. He argues that it is through a revitalization of invention through the formal elements of parody media (e.g. language play, fictionalized personas, uncanny juxtapositions) that critical public media pedagogies can move past the “entertainment/news” binary that has barred their entry from “legitimate” public discourse. For Greene this historical moment calls for a revitalization of the analytical skills central to composition studies and shows like Colbert and Stewart are well-aligned to demonstrate such skills within the context of a media ecology that propagates a volatile blend of diverse perspective and ideological entrenchment. He concludes that the practice of satiric invention popularized by parody media coupled with the creation of one’s own parody media critique, empowers students to explore the holes in the border between playful and “legitimate” analyses, mirroring the illusory entertainment/news divide erected between parody and traditional news media.

Clearly the current political and educational landscape is ripe for critical interrogation about the limits and possibilities of media functioning as sites of contestation, oppression, and liberation. The authors engage in dangerous work in dangerous times, when the limits of public discourse and civil liberties are under siege. We hope that readers consider this text an invitation and call for reflection, diligence, and action to fight the ways in which media distort the worlds through which we traverse.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION


*Rebecca A. Goldstein*
*Montclair State University*
PART ONE

PROBING THE MEDIA: CONTEXTS, THEORIES, AND PROBLEMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY
1. CURRERE 2.0

A 21st-Century Curricular “Know Thyself” Strategy Explicating Cultural Mediations of What It Means and Not to Be Fully Human

Knowing yourself is not so much about introspection and interaction. To know yourself is to realize that you are more than the little self that has been given to you by your history—the pattern that others made—that your true self is, in truth, much larger and includes other people, other cultures, other species even. That life is less about being and more about interbeing. We come to know ourselves, then, through coming to know each other. And the deeper that knowledge, the richer and more creative the world we build together.

(Martin, n.d.)

OPENING CODES

Dear readers, welcome to this inquiry. Thanks for being curious.

Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003) noted eleven years ago, regarding the field of curriculum studies, that:

The US curriculum field can be seen as existing in a state of perpetual crisis. Whether one reads the literature of the field, speaks with veteran professors about the formative years of their careers, attends contemporary conferences, or peruses the academic journals of the day, a palpable feeling of a sense of continuing crisis emerges. (p. 425)

Some 35 years before Wraga and Hlebowitsh made this claim, Schwab (1969) declared, after applying six measures regarding what counts as crisis, that the field of curriculum studies was “moribund.” That is, the field was like the walking dead academically, intellectually, and pedagogically. So, from 1969 to 2003, what happened to take curriculum studies from a state of being walking dead-like into a state of continuing crisis?

A contextualizing short story: Long ago, at the turn of the 20th century, in an emergent information and communicating technologies mediated land, the Kingdom of America, there was a wizard named Dewey. Dewey’s magic muse, Pragmatism, was a shift-changer and morphed into, when applied to curriculum and education, Progressivism. With such magic, Dewey advanced a way of knowing ontologically

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and of doing, learning and being a learner grounded as such by rejecting the predatory and divisive dualistic nature of King Modernity’s metaphysical and epistemological regimes of naming what was real, true, right, and just. Dewey sought to enlighten and enliven and make green the fields of curriculum and education by showing and telling that learning must be organically learner-focused, inquiry-based, and citizenship-oriented. However, just as Dewey’s spells began to show effects, the Kingdom was, post-World War II, overrun by a brutish mechanical demon born of manufactured political, corporatized, and sociocultural outcomes-driven regimes of accountability. Curriculum studies and schooling applications turned towards an uber-technical diagnostic and prescriptive determinism seemingly new to the land. Curricular, institutional, and assessment cycles mutated categorically in relation to the political, corporate, and societal literacy and numeracy outputs demanded of a modern school as sorting machine. Success was defined by minded utility oppressively technically defined. The results were generations of the young who were what Alfred North Whitehead (1967) called “soul murdered.” Contemporary curriculum theorizing at this point had solidified into a state of moribund homeostasis. Effective and efficient and technically precise curriculum theorizing and schooling had actually, ironically, uncoupled itself from the real-world practices of the life-world of schooling. Schools were dead zones.

Change is constant. Where there is darkness, ugliness, and multi-headed monsters, inevitably light arrives, beauty emerges, and a slayer appears. Enter a self- and disciple-proclaimed hero. Born into the dark becoming light in 1947, William Pinar, an archetypal stranger, comes of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Led by (Prince) Pinar, an emergent generation of curriculum slayer-scholars launch a self-styled “Reconceptualization” of the field of curriculum studies. A new greening Camelot of curriculum as political, economic, gendered, social, and cultural subjectivities seems evident. This new magic was grounded in an ability to be critically self-aware. That is, a know thyself as a mediated and mediating set of assumptions regarding how self–other, subjectivity–objectivity, and intentionality–happenstance play out in and across one’s life stages. Pinar, recovering an element of Dewey’s magic, proclaims that the field of curriculum studies requires persons capable of a commitment to such a method of self-inquiry. The magic potion Prince Pinar offers is a method to learn how to see oneself as a mediated and mediating complex architecture of constructed sights, sites, and cites.

However, today, to complicate matters even more, the Kingdom is being hyperactively overrun by tsunamis of cultural, political, and economic change driven by rampant neoliberalism, globalization, consumptive capitalism, and hypervirtual information and communication technologies. There seems little hope of a happy-ever-after-new-beginning ending for the Kingdom. Perhaps the moral of this tale is that being human, in a curricular, course of study sense is continuously being returned to the original difficulty that we were humanoid creatures long before we declared ourselves human beings.
THE END OF THE BEGINNING…

Now here is our inquiry turn. Oscar Wilde was purported to have said, “Life imitates art far more than art imitates Life.” Currently, culture is a hypermediated habitus. We are interested in understanding the culture and curriculum interplay. We are interested in how we, as learners and citizens, are both cultural and curricular mediated and mediating beings living in an age of explicit and hidden hypermediation—none of which is neutral. In this regard, we propose to explore Pinar’s (1975) The Method of Currere as a know thyself engagement which led him to ignite curricular and educational reform. Certainly, a claim could be that, via the Reconceptualist Movement, the field of curriculum studies was recovered, somewhat, from a state of morbidity.

Pinar’s (1975) currere is an inquiry-based know thyself method. It requires a person to knowingly and critically engage with and inquire into what he or she might recover as time past, present, and future moments—frozen conceptualizations revealing the mediating relationships between one’s temporal and conceptual becoming the person one seems to be. As a stage-driven inquiry, one seeks to discover awareness of states of self. Specifically, self at noteworthy stages of one’s educational evolution. This know thyself process had validity for Pinar seemingly because he was, in fact, awash in his own time-located cultural mediations. That is, his validity reference, as an aspiring intellectual, was that of a scribal (Purves, 1990) society-dominated habitus. Pinar had been read, spoken and gestured into existence within a world privileging the written/spoken word—and particular kinds of words—words logically and sequentially ordered, words that were prescriptive, argumentative, and expository in intent. Such words probably dominated his early world, and riddled his schooling, and shaped his scholarly inquiry realities. Although he lived through the sign wars—the written word versus the image—of the 1960s and onwards to today, his references, in 1975, when he was 28 years old, were available to him in culturally mediating rear-view mirrors—the written, and highly prized, and inaccessible to most, works of the ancient Greeks and Romans; the thinkers of emergent Christianity; the philosophers, scholars, and artists of the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Reformation, and the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions; and so on. Based on what we seek to show here, Pinar’s mediated existence led him to generate a self-awareness method—currere—that seems to upgrade Plato’s Cave Allegory. We seek to unpack Pinar’s (1975) Method of Currere and hopefully move it forward as a possible way of enlivening conversations regarding today’s hypermediated culture, seemingly rendering human beings into humanoid creatures—indeed, automatons that are zombies—walking dead-like.

To review: Might an updated version of Pinar’s Method of Currere enable a 21st-century citizen to understand the amplifying and negating hypermediating habitus—often called the posthumanist era—in which they live? Might Currere 2.0 offer a way to explore what it means every day to use and be used by the hypermediations of today’s culture which is, in fact, a public pedagogy?
We shape our tools and afterwards they shape us. (McLuhan in Culkin, 1967)

At the time Pinar (1975) was typing the Method of Currere, the Western world was awash with then new tools such as the telegraph, telephone, typewriter, and xerography (a dry photocopying technique) and media such as television, cinema, radio, newspapers, magazines, and books. Fast-forward some 40 years, and the media-technology landscape is now ubiquitously riddled with newer electronic and digital tool-technologies such as personal computers, hand-held computing devices, the Internet, mobile phones, and social media systems. Castells and Ayoama (2002) indicate that “the shift from industrialism to informationalism is not the historical equivalent of the transition from agriculture to industrial economies” (p. 138).

What is the difference that makes a difference with today’s media information and communication technologies (ICTs) regarding relationships persons have with their environments, with others, and even with themselves? Castells and Ayoama (2002) respond that the shift to informationalism is nothing less than perhaps the next stage of human evolutionary development. Individuals and collectives have been transported from traditional forms of mass media which had a delivery model of one-to-many and a one-way flow of information or entertainment now in an informationalistic hyper-mediated existence whereby how digitalization operates is redefining what it means to be human or not.

Outtake

Across the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Western societies are experiencing another catapulting human-(re)defining evolutionary-revolutionary ancient Greece and Rome-like, Renaissance-like, Reformation-like, Enlightenment-like, Industrial Revolution-like, Nuclear Age-like, 1960s Cultural-Societal Moment-like epoch. Electronic/digital tool-technologies have catapulted human beings into another level of development called Transhumanism/Posthumanism.

Transhumanism is an “intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by using technology to … greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities” (Bostrum, 1999). Underlying this worldview is a core belief that the human species in its current form does not represent the end of our development, but rather its beginning.

Posthumanism is that intellectual and cultural movement seeking to redefine what it means to be human. Four posthuman assumptions are: (1) patterns of information are more essential to the state of being than any “material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life”; (2) there is no immaterial soul and consciousness is an epiphenomenon; (3) the body is nothing more than a prosthesis and exchanging
it for another is simply an extension of that relationship; and (4) that a human being is capable of being “seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” (“Transhumanism and posthumanism,” 2014).

As early as 1957, McLuhan began drawing attention to human modifications in knowing, doing, and being evolving electronic image-driven media technologies. This new media offered a transformative metaphysics of presence altering forms of personal and public expression and representation (McLuhan & Zingrone, 1995). The moving image was openly at war with the still word. The scribal society word intended to describe, explain, argue, persuade, or perhaps to narrate. The dead word had currency because it had distancing properties. An author is separated from audience, thus offering an objectifying and authoritative perspective. In a Cartesian world order, distance is good—it shows one to be logical, detached, rational, and, obviously, dead right. In contrast, being close is dangerous, because then, one is susceptible to being subjectively implicated—that is, subjectively present is equal to being emotional and thus irrational. Words—even oral words which, to be considered valid, mimic written words—are abstract–sophisticated sign systems that require learned literacies of decoding. But the word is essentially the world with the “I” removed; in this case, the “I” equals life. On the other hand, moving images are direct eye-to-brain entry mediators. Moving images and moving text (such as texting and Twitter) are seducing I-eye-aye conduits to our trifold brains. Moving images are especially appealing to our 100,000-year-old lizard brain and its survival mandates—fight, flight or freeze. The image is impactful, direct, existentially close, and requires immediate bodily responses. The 21st-century ICT media is grounded not in scribal sound-bites, but eye-bites—the currency of the moving image.

In 1962, McLuhan wrote The Gutenberg Galaxy. Herein he grouped human developmental history in four media-revolutionary epochs: (1) oral tribe culture, (2) manuscript culture, (3) the Gutenberg galaxy, and (4) the electronic age. McLuhan (1962) insisted that each new tool-technology (alphabets, printing presses, speech, and so on) have a gravitational effect on human cognition and social organization, such that:

If a new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world, then new ratios among all of our senses will occur in that particular culture. … when the sense ratios alter in any culture then what had appeared lucid before may suddenly become opaque, and what had been vague or opaque will become translucent. (McLuhan, 1962, p. 41)

In 1964, McLuhan published Understanding Media. Therein he reaffirmed that new invented technologies will push and pull with effect and affect on human cognition and, therefore, human social organization. Although early McLuhan was primarily interested in the print media, before his death in 1980, he argued, not unlike Heidegger—who, calling on Marxist Homo-Faber essentialism of human as tool-designer, tool-maker, and tool-user that if one had a hammer at hand, then everything else looked like a nail—that all technologies are never neutral.
Interestingly, today’s tool-technology digital age persons seem to be experiencing a shift in relationships from written word literacy back to prehistory image-orality (Marchessault, 2004, p. xiv). That is, before the written word, human creatures communicated for survival by using as many sensory media as possible. The result was a communicative performance piece utilizing sounds, images, gestures, props, or whatever was at hand to create a narrative, description, explanation, or argument for or against. What was required for this communication to work was that others had to gather in proximity, be engaged, and agree the representations held meaning and be able to replicate the medium which was the message. The digi-electronic age basically replicates, virtually, a hypermediated visual-oral-plus metaphysics of presence—a metaphysics of presence with mediations that directly make one both producer and consumer of meanings. McLuhan (1964) notes the media and their workings and operating activities are the medium which, irrespective of any content, “creates an environment by its mere presence” (p. 8). McLuhan (1964) then claimed that all media-technologies are extensions, amplifications, and negations of the human body, or of the body parts, abilities and senses. Castells (1996, 2001), like McLuhan, provides insights for understanding the mediating impacts of information and communication technologies on individual/private and social/public life. Every aspect of 21st-century life relationships are now linked digitally, interconnected within networks within networks. According to Castells (1996, 2001), we now exist, willingly or not, within hypermedia neutral infrastructures—a digital habitus—that enables and disables, empowers and disempowers most persons. Societal members are being shaped by how the technotools function as amplifications or negations of ways of knowing, doing, and being. Every linguistic, physical, mechanical, electronic, and digital techno-tool mediates (Howard, 2011). Castells (1996, 2001) contends that digital networks shape how information is offered, in turn, actually shaping persons’ and communities’ neutral networks. We mimic how the tools function. Castells (1996, 2001) noted that in an ubermediated world, techno-tools’ structures and functions actually elevate and devalue specific and peculiar kinds of private and public social interactions and empower and disempower at the same time what counts as authority, control, and power. Fortunate is the person who can tell the difference between the multiple forms of realities and, indeed, what it means, more or less, to be human or not.

CITING SITES AS SIGHTS OF DIGITAL HYPER-MEDIATISATION HABITUS—ZOMBIE CULTURE AND SCHOOL CULTURE

Ihde (1979) noted—like McLuhan and Castells—that all technologies foundationally reshape how persons experience time, space, and body relationships. Digitization transforms historical, philosophical, and practical human-to-human and human-to-habitus relationships. Smith (2003) notes that the current domination of humanity is not by material want or religious superstition or arbitrary political power, but by man-made hypermedia technologies. Technologies have always been humanity’s
Promethean gift—simultaneously liberating and enslaving. Dewdney (1988) notes that today’s and tomorrow’s digi-technologies are progressively regressing human beings into humanoid creatures. That is, our present biological substrate, our human bodies and brains, are increasingly, through amplification and negation, rendering our biological equipment as provisional (Dewdney, 1988). Is the digital age an historical footnote marking the beginning of the end of what were body-physical human beings?

Outtake Site/Sight/Cite Z

Biology is a software process. Our bodies are made up of trillions of cells, each governed by this process. You and I are walking around with outdated software running in our bodies, which evolved in a very different era. (Kurzweil, n.d.)

The cultural zombie apocalypse. Half way through the second decade of the 21st century, entertainment culture is saturated with representations of zombies. Why the media cultural zombie apocalypse now?

Although the zombie has been a part of western media-culture depictions since the early 1930s, there has been recent unprecedented growth in representations of zombies, and Botting (2013) writes:

Embodying polarization and ambivalence without resolution, the zombie figure is both the mass numbed into robotic subservience without higher aims or aspirations, and the system that mindlessly accumulates without human consideration or sense of values (other than shared values of course). (p. 1)

Shared values? Is it possible that from the moment, perhaps in the moment, we, as a species became sentient regarding what we were not, our species destiny was perhaps predetermined? There are myth-stories about that moment of awakening—a moment when we realized we were a species emergent from primordial swamps, or as the spawn of aliens, or as divine gifts. Once aware, we became an all-in-one premodernist/modernist/postmodernist project. If most creation myth-stories are about ascension, is not our project destiny to become ancient Greek/Roman/Christian/Cartesian Gods? That is, not bound to this earth, but to become idealized perfection. Indeed, have not all tool-technologies and their mediating qualities we have ever designed, made, and used been in the service of such a project of perfection?

McLuhan (1964) names four tool-technology mediated laws: (1) amplification, (2) obsolescence, (3) retrieval, and (4) reversal. Played out in the 21st century through the proliferation of hypermediating tool-technologies, our hypermediated environments are awash in tensions between the real and virtual, and the literal and metaphorical. Embedded in this tension are claims and counterclaims regarding the powerful promises of what newer technologies will enable us to accomplish (amplification). That means, in contrast, current tool-technologies will become increasingly useless (obsolescence)—such is progress. Progress means moving forward into becoming the
perfection promised by Plato, Christ, Descartes, Einstein, and Hawking. We ascend to being Gods (retrieval). Again, tool-technologies as mediating pharmaceuticals will enable a termination of what has been the plague of becoming consciously fragmented living in dead weight bodies. We must return to our original forms—a total seamless and undifferentiated form of spirited and embodied perfection (reversal).

The zombie apocalypse proliferating in the media is a documentary of the perfection project moving forward. Persons are recognizing being trapped in aging, eventually diseased, always smelly, forever decaying and absolutely pathetic bodies. These bodies are also trapped in meaningless economic, political, and social interactions evident in the drudgery of living daily interruptible existences—hopelessly, the walking dead. But relief is but a flick, click, or slide away. Instantly hypermedia tool-technologies offer a larger-than-life, more real-than-life stimulations of representations of being virtually alive. In that site, my sight is godlike, and I can be who or whatever I want to be, do what I want to do. In hypercyber culture, there are the offerings of experiential orgasmic moments of consumptively being alive. However, such hypermediated experiences are momentary. One needs—no, craves—more sustainable nourishment. Being digitally connected is the fix. Connectivity 24/7/365 highlights the uselessness of the body. Permanently needing to be distracted by the next media invention or a newer technology, the embodied zombie becomes, ironically, a hypermedia consumeristic zombie. But then why not? Are not media zombies a marvellous science project in progress? Are they not in the service of “the” project?

The Cultural Zombie Apocalypse is a sign of the times. It is a sign of that evolutionary modernist project. Our tool-technologies are now powerful enough to make the next leap. The walking dead are living exemplars of what is just the beginning of the possibilities when rendering bodies obsolete. By showing and telling the limitations of temporal and terminal bodies and seeking seductions offered by the inheritances of promises of being Gods of the universe, well—God bless the zombie. And, God bless the entrainment industry for showing children their immediate futures.

Outtake Site/Sight/Cite A … B … C

We don’t need factories to create Drones with Artificial Intelligence…Schools are doing a great job of it. (DeSouza, n.d.)

The School as a Zombie Production Site. Some time ago, Europe moved from agricultural systems to industrialized systems of production and consumption. At that time, an emergent public education system took on present-day intentionality, functionality, and structures. Subsequently, schools were designed to reflect and represent what counts as industrialization. Schools became specialized in sorting human capital. How is sorting realized? Evoking inheritances from the ancient Greeks, the modern school sought to sort by way of thinking tools. Also brought forward from early and late Christian inheritances were knowing, doing, and being
moral tools. Brought forward from craft-making inheritances were knowing, doing and being working tools. These tool-technology ways of knowing, doing, and being, again, thanks to the ancient Greeks, were called Episteme, Phronesis, and Techne, and were applied as measurement and sorting backbones of Western schooling systems. Episteme honors abstraction, generalization, theory and the hierarchical, objective, sequential, principled, and law-driven; techne honors craft-technical know-how and abilities to get things done, and is structured and explicit; and phronesis honors practical wisdom and is organic, social, moral-ethical, and tactful. As time passed, schools and within-schools programs and routes were established based on these sorting silos generally, and the means to the sorting end was institutionalized. All curricular, instructional, and assessment progress is measured within and across the silos. In the late 20th century, the three silos were renamed as Academic, Vocational, and Religious education. In the early 21st century, based on an accountability-driven, outcomes-based education movement, the silos are now known as KSAs—Knowledge (Episteme), Skills (Techne), and Attributes (Phronesis).

Despite all of the change discussions and implementations to improve schooling across the last 100 years, Reynolds (2014) claims there has only been a “type of recycling and not reform in education” (p. 33). Reynolds (2014) notes that the sorting silos have been renamed, but their intent to continually refine the sorting of persons required in the movement from a production-oriented culture to an increasingly consumeristic culture has not. Contemporary schooling remains experientially what it always has been. It is a head/mind and body/hand, moral or not, sorting machine. Schooling of the mind sorts learners based on the demonstrable accumulations of the sacred sign systems of literacy and numeracy. Schooling of the body sorts learners on the demonstrable accumulations regarding being good standardized workers. Schooling of the soul sorts learners on the demonstrable accumulations of potential to serve the great unwashed. The result is, no matter the route, stream, or program, all knowledge, skills and attributes learners are sorted.

With the progressive movement to a digitally mediated hypercyber culture, a fourth kind of knowledge was set free to run rampant across the ménage à trois boundaries of episteme, techne, and phronesis. Métis is a way of knowing, doing, and being that calls one to be in a moment ready to respond to ambiguous circumstances. When theorizing—episteme—is unable to respond to the immediacy of an unpredictable situation, and knowing how as techne does not have a grip on a fluid situation, and when practical wisdom—phronesis—cannot categorically respond to a mutable and unsure event, Métis is somehow, in the moment, a way of knowing, being and doing. Métis may not have been taught, and no descriptive or expository words can fully contain or explain it. Métis lives in a responsive moment when someone just knows what to do, how, when, and with whom. In a three-silo educational system, Métis, in the young, looks oppositional, emotional, spontaneous, and threatening. Where is the playground for Métis in the real world? It is alive in abundance in the hypermediated cyber worlds of gaming, simulations, and hypertextual design. In those worlds, being in the moment, is to live responsively within shifting social orders and where
the rules regarding gender, sexuality, language, power and control are remade over and over. No wonder schools seem to be zombie lands in comparison—classroom and halls full of the process sorted walking dead. And what do schools do so they can attract, and stimulate, and be relevant to good students (read: academically inclined) and parents (read: wealthy) and claim to be progressive cutting-edge institutions? Without any deep understanding of how tool-technologies mediate time, space, body, and habitus relationships, they establish tool-technology user policies and practices (for pedagogic purposes), and then hope and pray to keep the genie in the bottle. The result then is more regimes of militaristic school surveillance and behaviour whip-and-carrot management systems to control uncontrollable technologies usage. Reinforcing that the school is an uninterruptable dead zone ensures a mass exodus of escapees from one zombie land to another.

**Currere 1.0 Denotations and Connotations**

Curricula do not just happen. They exist because particular people in a particular place at a particular time believed that someone else should know about something. Curricula have not simply come into being through divine intervention or the whims of fate. Instead, they have arisen out of conflicts of interests in which the wishes of certain individuals and groups have prevailed. Somehow, somewhere, at some time, and for some reason, someone’s preferences have held sway. (Brookfield, 1995, p. 40)

Nowhere is the invitation to consider our descriptions above more relevant than when we wonder: How do we know—ontologically and epistemologically—we are “particular people in a particular place at a particular time” who “believed that someone else should know about something.” As a response, how has Pinar’s (1975) Method of Currere identified particularities?

Pinar’s formative years were like those of most baby boomers. Pinar, in the mid-1970s, along with Madeleine Grumet, produced the Method of Currere. It was an attempt to radicalize thinking about curriculum and move the field from being a moribund noun to a reflexive verb. Currere, meaning a running of a course, was a way of understanding one’s life curricula through studying how one became oneself (Pinar, 2011, p. 44).

This method uses transbiographic processes to explore curricular particular experiences across one’s educative life moments. Pinar (1975) insisted currere was a way to challenge the deep-seated mediating and often controlling assumptions we all have regarding our normalizing curricular lives. Currere is eclectically located between existentialism, phenomenology, Jungian psychoanalysis, the psychiatry of R. D. Laing, and aspects of literary and educational theory (Pinar, 1975, p. 403). Norris and Sawyer (2012) describe currere as “an act of self-interrogation in which one reclaims one’s self from one’s self as one unpacks and repacks the meanings that one holds” (p. 13).
Pinar (1975) came to currere by questioning his own life-history and educational biography and critically exploring choice decisions he had made along the way—in particular, choices regarding what interested him as a person, citizen, and as an educator. Pinar (1975) asked, why do I do the things I do? Why this action and not that? Based on his educational and intellectual training, he chose to respond to such questions using free-flow or uninterrupted writing. Pinar (1975) began collecting free-association data about his own educational, intellectual, and lived experiences. Then, with a specific time conscious process of location and dislocation inquiry, he advanced understandings of why he had made the decisions he had and how such understandings opened up complicated conversations regarding the ways he had come to know, do, and be as a curricular person.

However, to engage in such an uncovering process, requires courage. Exposing or shining a light on our inner most remembered experiences as recovered or recalled is not a simple task. Most of us have lived lives of excusing deception and soothing denial or affirming avoidance or conversely blinding obedience, or demonstrations of dogged determination. Pinar (1975) noted that if one is able to engage thusly with the currere method, the rewards and outcomes can be both liberating and transformative. Currere enables curricula particular persons to study self and in doing so locate capacities to engage meanings of particular experiences. In this process, layers of assumptions regarding often mediated relationships between self, others, and the world are exposed.

The method of currere, as Pinar (1975) describes it, uses four stages, and they are the: (1) regressive, (2) progressive, (3) analytical, and (4) synthetical. The stages unpacked are:

**Regressive Stage.** What has already occurred, in the past, maintains a mediating and mediated hold on one’s present and potentially future. In order to understand how one’s seemingly self-made, but heavy inherited influencing biographical history contributes to shape the present, and how the past is often projected onto and even carried into the future, it is necessary to critically framed look back; to regress. In this stage, one visualizes teachers, textbooks, and the learning environments experienced. Each recalled event, person, and learning situation becomes a series of still image progressions. This process of recovered visualization moves on through the levels of schooling from elementary to post-secondary. The focus is on the particularities of those times, spaces, and positive and negative relationships. One recalls one’s interest and disinterest in certain subjects, specific teachers, particular classmates, and any engaged with or witnessed athletic or extracurricular activities. Also, one notes the importance of any local, national or international events that occurred. The recovered observations are recorded in writing or by voice and then later expanded upon with more details added. According to Pinar (1994), archived observations “coalesce to form a photograph” and that “holding that photograph up in front of oneself, one studies the detail, the literal holding of the picture and one’s response to it, suggestive of the relationship of the past to the present” (p. 24).

**Progressive Stage.** Here one is invited to look toward imagined possibilities, probabilities, or futures. Bring focused envisioning attention to academic, or
intellectual, and educational interests and, again, allow self to free-associate. Who might I be in five years? In ten years? Where might I be across that time span? What might I be doing across those specific time periods? Will I be with anyone? Once these imagined projected responses generated, then record as envisioned data observations. Watch for what emerges as relationships to imagined future lives and evolving educational, academic, and scholastic interests. Look for particular personal and professional life connections and projections.

*Analytical Stage.* This stage involved two gestures. First, take the recovered recordings (written, or told, or represented) of recovered past and imagined future, and set them aside. What remains to be examined and understood is the present. The present needs to be recognized as momentarily exclusive of the past and the future. The task is to foreground the present and bring it into a more conscious state by asking: Who am I, really, honestly, today? What do I do now? How do I do what I do today? What are my current spaces or places like? What are my interests and disinterests today? Pinar (1975) suggests to “photograph the present as if one were a camera, including oneself in the present taking the photograph, and your response to this process” (p. 26). Second, take the past, present, and future data, and begin a process of data analysis. Break the three frames featuring you in the past, present, and future, and link or thread these pieces together as if parts of a large puzzle. Explore educative, pedagogic, and curricular connections between remembered past, manifest present, and imagined future. What is consistent or common or that threads across the three separate time framings? What fundamental (auto)biographic themes do these three data sources reveal?

*Synthetical Stage.* In this stage, Pinar (1975) requires one to focus on self as if looking in a mirror. However, this is not an exercise in reflection – in admiring or in picking out flaws. Currere is a reflexive process. There is an agency in seeing/looking at temporal selves evoking engaged, thoughtful, and ethical action in response. What are the obvious and not connections between past remembered, present lived, and future imagined? How were, and are, and will be, scholarly and professional interests forefronted across the stages of currere? Have, and do, and will one’s interests in education and curriculum lead towards actions seeking responsible freedoms and tactful courage and compassionate intelligence? Am I positive or destructive? Merging this final photograph with the previous three brings one’s lived, living, and possible worlds together into a working synthesis framing who I was, who I am, and who I want to be.

**ANCHORING**

*Currere 2.0—Know Thyself 21st-Century Posthuman Style*

But now, in this century of ideologies, the Gods and Destiny have been given new life. “Miracles in the world are many,” Sophocles wrote in the fifth century BC. “There is no greater miracle than man.” Suddenly, at the end of
the twentieth century, we discover that no, after all, it isn’t true. Historical inevitability is a greater miracle than man. As is the dialectic. … As is the genius of an abstract mechanism called the market. As is the leadership of inanimate objects—called technology—which worker bees create and then, inevitably, are led by. These inevitabilities are great leaps backward into the arms of the Gods and Destiny. (Ralston Saul, 2014)

What Pinar advanced in 1975 with currere was a reflexive know thyself as a curriculum inquiry method. Applying the method enabled critical exploration, as temporal beings – we are born to die—of how we, through educative mediations, were shaped into who we were, are, and could be. Such insights opened up for the Reconceptualists’ critical conversations regarding what must constitute a good ethical relationship between self, other, and world—purpose seemingly well served for Pinar and the Reconceptualists who revolutionized the field of curriculum studies. And why not? The times were ripe with change. Pinar learned from his currere reflexivity there is a direct mediating link between contemplation and action. Currere itself was a mediating tool-technology. A specific sight-site-cite inquiry process enabling an inquirer to become aware of his or her own time-specific, educative-mediated qualities. Pinar (1975) sought a complicated conversation via currere with self as self and self and other. His method as inquiry tool connected inquirer past, present, and future to author self-awareness commentaries by imploding or exploding time-specific educative life moments. The method has moved a person through the stages of being regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. But that was then. This is now—time passes. Is currere relevant or applicable within the epoch of posthumanism?

Weaver (2010) writes:

To treat technology solely as an intrusion of subjectivity and a threat to human liberties, is not only to deny the future but the past as well. … Technology is how humans remember. Books, lectures, myths, folktales, songs, films, television, and information technologies are all memory technologies. In the posthuman condition stem cell lines, gene sequences, DNA readings, erased wrinkles, enhanced body parts, and altered neurons are memory technologies. To ignore these memory technologies is to participate willingly in the erasure of individual and collective memories. It is to forget humanity and that there is a house waiting for us to inhabit. Curriculum scholars should not opt out of the posthuman discussions and the debates over the uses of the biosciences because the price of denial and erasure are too high. Ignoring (bio)technology or constructing it as an intrusion or threat to humanity prevents all of humanity to become who we are. (p. 144)

showed how the ancient Greeks’ originally interrogated and un Concealed the essence of technology. In doing so, they noted that the potentialities of humans with/in all technologies are such that the relationship between humans and technologies is both, in a moment, useful/instrumental and aesthetic/artistic. Currere 2.0, as a 21st century know thyself method, could use Pinar’s (1975) four-stage location and dislocation process. However, we no longer live in a scribal society. In the 21st century, the data to be gathered are not dead-time, word-described educative moments. In Currere 2.0, the necessary outcome to host a meaningful complicated conversation requires descriptions and narratives regarding one’s connectivity through time, space, and body relationships to all and any at-hand tool-technologies used by us, on us, through us, with us, amongst us, and so on yesterday, today, and possibly tomorrow. Tool-technologies are the origins of humanity, our history and our future destiny. By examining the born into used and user connections between our made tool-technologies and our making of our humanity, a Currere 2.0 inquiry process could make one responsible as an awakening zombie for a personal and public response to the ultimate humanizing question: What does it mean to be made of this world?

NOTE

1 Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: Dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170).

REFERENCES


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