

Corollary Effects: Curation of Quality, Voice, and Provocation

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Abstract:

As more curriculum scholars think of curriculum as *currere*—the dynamic development of self-understanding in the context of conversation and learning with others—and, as *storying* as a form of research dissemination grows in the curriculum field, I offer some thoughts on the following questions: How do my editorial choices cumulatively affect my community, the field, or me? How does my relationship to quality change? How might questions of quality both inspire and conspire against curriculum as *currere*? What does quality have to do with academic voice? What are my responsibilities in promoting provocative scholarship? And how might curation create new connections for the readership?

Keywords: *currere*, life-writing, autobiography, quality, voice, provocation, editorship, readership

That we imagine the butterfly effect would explain things in everyday life, however, reveals more than an overeager impulse to validate ideas through science. It speaks to our larger expectation that the world should be comprehensible—that everything happens for a reason, and that we can pinpoint all those reasons, however small they may be. But nature itself defies this expectation. "People grasp that small things can make a big difference," Emanuel [Professor at MIT] says. "But they make errors about the physical world. People want to attach a specific cause to events, and can't accept the randomness of the world". (Dizikes, 2008, p. 1)

As 2016 comes to a close, I reflect on my role of Editor-in-Chief of JCACS and the work I do in Canadian curriculum studies. I contemplate my actions in the selection of reviewers, in my turning toward or turning away from reviewer comments, in the acceptance and rejection of manuscripts, in my ordering of manuscripts, in my cover selections, and in my email communications with authors. How do these choices cumulatively affect my community, the field, or me? In the complex systems we are a part of, how might we know how these initial conditions, my seemingly quotidian decisions, will affect results within a future system? The butterfly effect, coined by Lorenz (1963) is used to metaphorically describe small causes as having large effects. Dizikes (2008) shifts the perspective—he suggests that science “helps us understand the universe . . . by revealing the limits of our understanding” (p. 1). As I reflect on being an editor, I am struck by the limits of my knowing.

In this issue, as authors take up curriculum as *currere* (Pinar 1975, 2011; Pinar & Grumet, 1978); and as *storying* grows in the curriculum field, I compare how, as a curator, the ways I have grappled with the critical issues of *quality* and *consent* mirror similar issues I face as an editor. As a curator, I am simultaneously interested in the quality of content and the quality of rendering. The effectiveness of artwork is based on the skill, rendering, and conveyance of the message. In the academic world, how successful can research be if the writing is weak? If the mandate of JCACS is to publish provocative and innovative scholarship, how might we sustainably support authors’ questioning of the processes and representations of knowledge, while also considering journal quality standards that may be based on the very knowledge that is being questioned? In thinking of this dilemma, I liken the quality of rendering to academic voice. As a curator and editor, what responsibilities do I have to the public for exhibiting/publishing provocative work?

Curation – Currere – Care

As curator of Lakehead Research Education Galleries, my approach to editorship takes on a particular slant. The artworks for the galleries I curate are vetted by a multi-person international team. I then use the collated adjudicators’ recommendations to accept or reject artworks, group the artworks for exhibition, support artists in how to showcase their works, and make arrangements for display. My work in promoting, marketing, selling, and moving the work of others from private to public venues is personally rewarding. My engagement with others’ creations inherently creates care for the other. Irwin (2016) and Jung (2016) describe the process of *currere* in terms of care. The etymological meaning of *curate* is, “one responsible for the care (of souls). . . [and] to take care of” (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2016). I contemplate how my care of others’ curricula affects me as an editor and I am humbled by the privilege. *Currere* is the complicated development of self-understanding (Pinar, 1975; Pinar & Grumet, 1978) with others in pedagogical conversation (Pinar, 2012). As editor, if I consider myself the subject (object of study), I gain a “deeper and clearer understanding of the present by outlining the past, present, and future” (p. 2). *Currere* is the attempt to “explore the complex relation between the temporal

and the conceptual” and “in doing so, to disclose [my] relation to the Self in its evolution and education” (p. 3). This editorial itself, a narration of learning with the focus on the self in relation and context, is *currere*, and it attempts to provide a commentary on concerns prompted by articles in this issue as an alternative to an introduction of each article.

The inner workings of review and publication are not always evident to readers. I think of manuscript reviewers akin to someone walking by an artwork, stopping to look deeply, and asking questions or thinking, “If I made that, I would have. . . .” In the gallery, since the artwork is completed, reviewer responses cannot shape the work; however, manuscript reviewers are expected to commit significant time and energy and can offer insight to writers about what does not come across clearly. Reviewers are invited to offer engagement, commitment, and care. Because the reviewers’ comments reveal opinions, perspectives, and histories, disagreement between authors and reviewers is common. Most reviewers’ comments are challenges to the writers—asking for more. They are asking for clarification. Often, reviewers need clearer initial conditions or boundaries for the claims being made. From my workings with transdisciplinary teams, while respectful disagreements often are epistemologically based, colleagues are frequently asking for the “way” to understand a rationale—for a deeper explanation of the tenets for the thinking, as well as time for discussions on the limitations of the selected research design and process. Authors, too, need to remember that a reviewer, despite how engaged they might be in the work, are still only providing one opinion, one response to the work.

Quality Restriction

In attempting to promote innovation, opinions and courses of action need substantiation. And while there is a culture of “safety” in academic scholarship, specifically in favouring only the funding of conservative incremental advances (Froderman, 2012), Canadian curriculum studies continues to need innovators who research in ways that create divergent and transformed thinking, to robustly cultivate creativity in education and in the readership, and to consider publication as pedagogical. These ideas easily segue into complicated conversations on quality. How does our relationship to quality change? What is our disciplinary history regarding questions of quality? How might notions of quality both inspire and conspire against curriculum as *currere*? If we align ourselves to a common standard of quality, might JCACS manuscripts all become homologous? While rigorous research practices are imperative, can method and analysis be thoroughly explicated given the limitations of the manuscript format?

Voice and Quality

What does quality have to do with academic voice? Quality is predominantly used to refer to a standard as measured against similar items or objects. The wonderful nuances of storying are that what works in some stories does not work in others, and the types of publications and research projects within Canadian curriculum studies are broad and discrete. Knowles (2001) notes how easy it is, as academics, to lose our voices, to defer to what is already in print, to quotes. He advises to focus on the “primacy of experience” and to “let the experience flow over you first . . . [and] before anything else, [to] make sense of the context—phenomenon, event, circumstance—first through the power of your analysis of experience” (p. 99). If we focus on experience, we will maintain voice.

Positivist paradigms of social reality may claim that researchers can be objective and suppose that the researcher’s voice can be hidden in the reporting of findings. The researcher’s voice can also easily be “washed” from the text by adopting an academic tone:

It will be important that we continue to reflect on how we manage voice in the academy. By subscribing to one academic voice, we conflate the way we can convey experience.

Promoting Provocative Scholarship: Readiness and Perspective

As the curriculum field includes more life-history writing and pedagogical documentations of autobiographical learnings, I consider the possibilities and challenges of informed consent of not only bystanders and characters disclosed in the writings, but also readers of provocative works. How do we navigate the complicated landscapes of the private in public arenas? Galleries have been faced with how provocative exhibitions can be “bounded” from the broader public through various means. For example, exhibitions unsuitable for minors may be placed in a separate room in the gallery, or labeling can prepare viewers. Exhibitions that declaim, or push a statement, press the edge of viewer sensibilities. Readiness for particular types of narratives is not only an individual consideration but a community and even a geographically-determined notion. In working on international book award committees over the last three years, I have noted how international scholars view Canadian curriculum scholarship as especially innovative and fresh. What protocols are necessary for considering readership consent of especially provocative curriculum scholarship?

My research with transdisciplinary teams and my advocacy for a research process called Parallaxic Praxis, which honours and encourages multiple perspectives and ways of seeing, has taught me how variable perspective is. The range and idiosyncratic organization of language, epistemologies, and ontologies make us each the specific researchers, writers, and readers we are. Interpretation is always distinct and thus, the level of provocation too, is variable.

Curation as Editorship

As I look toward 2017, I do not think of my work as having a butterfly effect. Rather, as Dizikes (2008) reminds, research teaches us where we can point our questions. My editorship is curation—to bring forward the private into the public, to showcase the authors’ work in the best means possible, so that the content and rendering are fluidly nuanced examples of quality, and that innovation within the research can glow through the JCACS venue.

I invite you to the provocative scholarship of Robert Kull with “Feeling My Way From the University into the Wilderness and Back Again” and his photograph on the issue cover; Peter Gouzouasis and Diana Ihnatovych with “The Dissonant Duet: An Autoethnography of a Teacher-Student Relationship”; Ellyn Lyle with “The Role of Counter Narratives in the [Re]negotiation of Identity”; Susan Sych with “The Divide Between Vocational and Academic Education and How We Might Be Able to Repair the Rift”; Shirley Turner and Shannon Leddy with “Two Voices on Aboriginal Pedagogy: Sharpening the Focus”; Conrad McCallum and Lorna McLean with “Traces of the Past: Raising the Allumettières (Matchworkers) in Sites of Collective Remembering”; and Holly Tsun Haggarty with “Review of Curriculum for Miracles.” Enjoy.

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