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Introduction to Confronting Teacher Preparation Epistemicide: Art, Poetry, and Teacher Resistance

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Introduction to Confronting Teacher Preparation Epistemicide: Art, Poetry, and Teacher Resistance

Abstract

In this special issue, we present different perspectives from a documentary project on curricular epistemicide. We view curriculum epistemicide—the annihilation of curriculum—as an embodied process. It limits ways of knowing, questioning, and envisioning the world, and it constricts multiplicity and erases identity and culture. Authors within this volume responded to two requests: 1) they examined some form of epistemicide; and 2) they did not reinforce current systems of power and inequity. Throughout the issue, poetry and photography weave through theoretical papers and empirical studies. A range of methodologies are considered within the articles.

Keywords

curriculum, epistemicide, curricular resistance, book banning, poetry, photography, curricular possibilities, curriculum theory

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In this special issue, we present different perspectives from a documentary project on curricular epistemicide. We view curriculum epistemicide (Paraskeva, 2016)—the annihilation of curriculum—as an embodied process. It limits ways of knowing, questioning, and envisioning the world, and it constricts multiplicity and erases identity and culture. To be clear, we are not arguing a priori to exclude any particular form of curriculum, with the exception of curriculum which represents or promotes bigotry and normative domination in their many guises.

In the call for manuscripts for this issue we had two requests: 1) that the papers be about some form of epistemicide and 2) that they not reinforce current systems of power and inequity by discussing how to work within the current system of standards and accountability.

We begin the issue with the poem “Death to Curriculum” by M. Francyne Huckaby. In the poem, she offers these lines, “No need to question/No need for trouble.” In attempting to confront curriculum epistemicide, we ask you to question and trouble the hegemony of the current moment. We offer her poem(s) as an aesthetic frame to invite the reader to step outside a Western interpretive lens. To facilitate a process of “lens-switching” (McDermott McNulty, this issue) we have borrowed a musical form of organization for the issue: prelude, interludes, article-based themes, and postlude. We weave photography and poetry within the interludes.

In our arrangement of the photos, poems, and articles, we sought the necessary fluidity of exploring the crisis of epistemicide from multiple perspectives and with multiple voices. With varying foreground/background emphases, each author critically examines reflexivity, activism, and relational ways of being and constructing knowledge. However, given the relatively large number of articles, we felt it necessary to organize them thematically. But each article is interdisciplinary, and we consider the following thematic sections not as categories but as generative frames: resistance and self-reflection; erasure and censorship; critical political dimensions; emancipating curriculum through art, poetry, and film; unshackling the curriculum; teacher preparation possibilities to countering epistemicide; and--offering recursion--resistance and self-reflection.

Throughout the special issue we reject the inherent bigotry of regimes of normative (and norming) accountability, standards, and standardization, we ground education in critical ethics, including moral ethics. Moral ethics (Tom, 1984; Cooper, 2010) animates the principle, “Do no harm.” It underscores educators’ obligation to build caring, good, and worthwhile relations with students (Maxwell & Schwimmer, 2016). Care ethics “values emotion, imagination, and context over externally imposed rubrics of normative decision making” (Hamington, 2013, p. 32). Curriculum grounded in care ethics promotes “the independence and autonomy of the student [...and] the student’s right to responsible self-determination” (Biesta, 2015, p. 674). Furthermore, critical ethics, framed by the work of Paolo Freire (1970), supports social justice for self-and-societal liberation.

And since we consider curriculum embodied and lived, the erasure of identities not consistent with a normative and dominant curriculum—that is, a curriculum facilitating and maintaining a neoliberal curriculum of power for a primarily white, male, heterosexual elite—epistemicide is a direct threat to our existence. We see this curriculum operating to support the now dire political, social, and environmental outcomes of extreme social Darwinism. At this moment in time—around the world—curriculum is being desiccated by corporate national and international standards and non-democratic governments.

In this introduction, we need to acknowledge that the study of curriculum epistemicide has been central to the work of scholars historically. Critical scholarship, grounded in community survival, was central to the theory-and-practice of Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, Carter

Goodman, and W.E.B. DuBois in the 19th century. It was also central to the curriculum reconceptualist movement, starting in the early and mid 1970s. With curriculum reconceptualization, William Pinar reminds us that public education indoctrinates and creates identity. And that identity is grounded in epistemology—how do we know what we know—and ontology—how to we engage and be in the world. And that public education is both an artifact and a channel of the discourses that undergird epistemology. And, in the US, these discourses are moving rapidly toward one end game for public education—but not the only possibility—and that is formalized white supremacy. Indeed, hostile forces are working against curriculum in ruthlessly deleterious and pernicious ways. These hostile forces include, but are by no means limited to, the perils of accountability, standards, rubrics, backwards planning, scripted ways of knowing (otherwise known as metanarratives), capitalism, neoliberalism, high stakes instruction and testing, cross-national comparisons, one-size-fits-all educational certification and accreditation, American educational history, and education reform.

In “The Sadism of School Reform,” the first chapter of the edited volume *Alternatives to Privatizing Public Education and Curriculum*, Pinar writes “School ‘reform’—at its most ugly—represents nothing less than a crime against children, and as such, a crime against humanity” (p. 10). With Stephen Farenga (Farenga et al., 2015), we argued that standards and rubrics are tools of submission, and therefore contribute heavily to curriculum epistemicide. Rubric assessment is oppressive, and limits the future freedoms of opportunity. Further, many rubrics that are designed to augment the standardized, Eurocentric assessment process supply little, if any, additional data to teachers, parents, and students. In reality, rubrics are nothing more than semantic puzzles. Words such as “proficient,” “satisfactory,” “competent,” “sufficient,” “good,” “adequate,” and the like—terms with entirely different meanings—have all been used as false “validation” for the perpetuation of the dominant curriculum and, hence, curriculum epistemicide.

In addition to curriculum reconceptualization, another main inspiration for this special issue is the theme of the 2018 American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (AAACS) conference in New York City entitled “Hood and Highline,” which emphasized the importance of the arts and poetry as a means of revivifying curricula and ways of knowing in danger of obliteration. The articles herein are interdisciplinary and examine epistemicide from multiple dimensions, including artistic, curricular, political, cultural, methodological, and strategic components of the current state of curriculum—offering, hopefully, new possibilities for curriculum in the future.

Finally, we want to thank all the contributors to this special issue for working with us over the past year and—most importantly—offering their thoughts and resistance to confronting curriculum epistemicide.

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