

# Riding Fences: Anticipatory Governance, Curriculum Policy, and Teacher Subjectivity

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Jill Morris

*University of British Columbia*

Jean-Claude Couture

*University of Alberta*

Anne M. Phelan

*University of British Columbia*

## **Abstract**

In this article we question the discursive deployment of narrowing conceptions of the future in education in three provincial cases: Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. Asserting that educational policy in Canada is grounded in the “future-logics” of educational innovation—reflective of an anticipatory orientation to governance—we critique concepts from each province’s curriculum policy documents: “competence,” “personalized learning,” and “professional teacher.” We ask to what extent anticipatory governance is at work in Canadian policies, and if it is, to what degree does an anticipatory strategy occlude or disrupt the objectification of curriculum and the over-determination of teacher subjectivities?

*Keywords:* anticipatory governance, Canadian curriculum reform, teacher subjectivity

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## Résumé

Dans cet article, nous nous interrogeons sur le déploiement discursif de conceptions restrictives de l'avenir en éducation dans le cas de trois provinces : l'Alberta, la Colombie-Britannique, et l'Ontario. En affirmant que la politique de l'éducation au Canada est fondée sur les « logiques futures » de l'innovation en éducation — reflétant une orientation anticipative de la gouvernance —, nous critiquons certains concepts utilisés dans les documents de politiques du curriculum : « compétence », « apprentissage personnalisé », et « enseignant professionnel ». Nous nous demandons dans quelle mesure la gouvernance anticipative est à l'œuvre dans les politiques canadiennes et, si c'est le cas, dans quelle mesure une stratégie anticipative occulte ou perturbe l'objectivation du curriculum et la surdétermination de la subjectivité enseignante.

*Mots-clés* : gouvernance anticipative, réforme du curriculum canadien, subjectivité enseignante

## Introduction

The rabbit-proof fence in Western Australia bisects the state, protecting western agriculture from encroachment by animal pests from the east (Government of Western Australia, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, Agriculture and Food, 2022). Constructed to stop the spread of imported rabbits, it serves a purpose beyond its original conception. Collateral to protecting farmland, the fence interrupts the Aboriginal peoples' relationship with their land, restricting their ability to move freely and continue traditional hunting practices. In addition to functioning as a physical barrier, the rabbit-proof fence represents the ongoing restriction of Aboriginal agency, subjectivity, and possible futures. As Aitken (2018) notes, the fence itself “induces a knowledge in the Aborigines that crossing over the fence is forbidden; that their ancestral homelands were no longer accessible; no longer theirs to use as they wish or need” (p. 55).

*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, by Doris Pilkington Garimara (Pilkington, 1996) tells the story of three Aboriginal girls—Molly, Daisy, and Gracie—who walk over 1,900 kilometres along the length of the rabbit-proof fence. Removed from their maternal

homes and forcibly detained at the Moore River Native Settlement just outside of Perth,<sup>1</sup> in an act of resistance and refusal, the girls heed the advice of Molly's grandmother to "follow the rabbit-proof fence." Using the fence—a symbol of efforts that restrict access to other ways of knowing—Molly and Daisy are able to return home.<sup>2</sup>

This story invites a complex reading of the fence as metaphor: intended to secure and order a terrain, it ultimately governs movement and meaning. However, as it controls and restricts it also marks a topography that can be followed, perhaps revealing other ways onward. In using the metaphor of the fence we assert no ethical equivalency between the inter-generational struggle for justice of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia and our questioning of curriculum discourse and the dislocation of the teacher from the terrain of curriculum. Instead, we heed the wisdom of Molly and the rabbit-proof fence: by following curriculum policy that potentially stymies teacher subjectivities and agency, we open the possibility of other ways home.

In this article we question the discursive deployment of narrowing conceptions of the future in education and the role of the teacher in that future through a consideration of three Canadian provincial cases: Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility. Educational policy is overtly political, each province with its own historical landscape of regional concerns to be shepherded in service of particular ideologies. In our analysis, however, we discovered that regional differences—at least for the three provincial systems we studied—are becoming less significant. Provincial aims for education are increasingly oriented by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) growing involvement in education policy making and its focus on "competencies"—an evolving fluid construct in the global educational landscape coming into prominence after 2003 as the OECD sought new ways to advance the case for global comparisons of educational performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Sellar, 2015; Sjøberg, 2019; den Heyer, 2013).

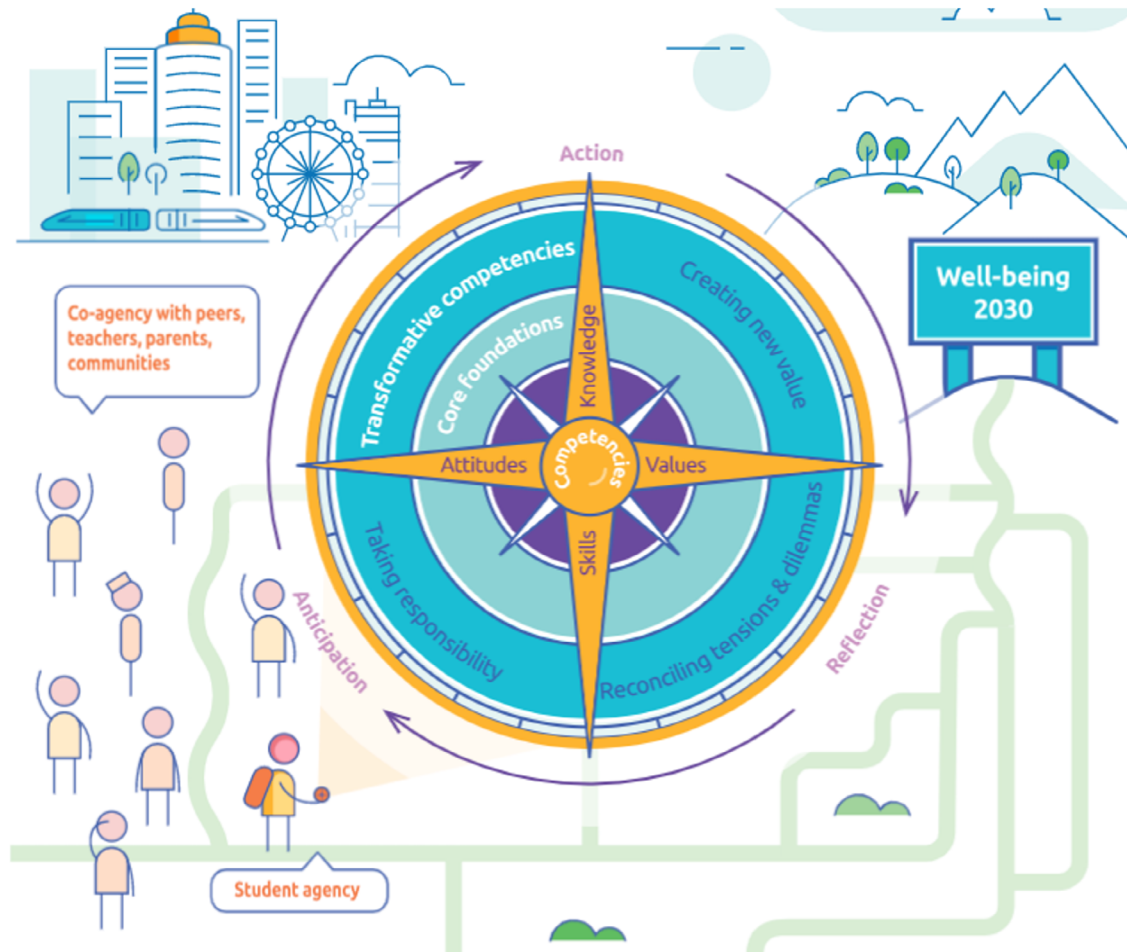
A video illustrating the merits of the OECD *Learning Compass* (OECD, 2019), offers a graphic of a compass (Figure 1) to help visualize the image of the student's journey in becoming "Future Ready."

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1 This is a story representative of the "Stolen Generations," the thousands of Aboriginal children who, from the mid-1800s to the 1970s, were removed from the care of their parents and community, and cut off from their culture.

2 Gracie is captured and returned to the Moore River Settlement.

Figure 1  
*The OECD Learning Compass*



The video narrator intones, “when a student holds *The Learning Compass*, he or she is exercising agency—the capacity to set a goal, reflect, and act responsibly to effect change—to act rather than be acted upon” (OECD, 2018).

The ideation represented by the avatar of the student depicted in *The Learning Compass* video deploys a particular future operationalized by the cancellation and colonization of alternative multiple futures and potential policy trajectories (Gacoin, 2019). These projections mobilized by the OECD have now

become part of our social imaginary and shape our social ontologies as a commonsense way of understanding global affairs and our orientations to the labour market...[they] shape our encounters with others who are different, mediate our communications, and guide our actions. (Robertson, 2021, p. 14)

This is certainly the case in the three Canadian provinces we studied. Although its role as a policy actor has diminished in the past decade (Bennett, 2021), the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) has enthusiastically embraced the OECD's *Future Ready* curricular architecture as an apparatus for constructing a pan-Canadian reform agenda (CMEC, 2020).

In our analyses of the three provinces, we begin with the assertion that provincial educational policy in Canada is grounded in the “future-logics” of educational innovation being promoted by the OECD, which work to produce and propel educational reforms that “capture” or corral particular conceptions of the past and present through an anticipatory orientation.

## **Theoretical Framing**

Anticipatory action involves foreseeing, foreshadowing, or forecasting future events (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 1). Aspirational in quality, anticipatory action “is a key means through which life in contemporary liberal democracies is secured, conducted, disciplined and normalized” (Anderson, 2010, as cited in Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 2). Anticipatory governance relies on assumed knowledge about the “future” to mobilize support for policy proposals and to ground decision making in “reasonable levels of facticity and predictability,” thereby projecting “the appearance of professional credibility and competence in a world of contingencies” (Nelson et al., 2008, as cited in Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 2).

Foucault (1982) has taught us that knowledge is closely related to power and governance. Governance is any strategy for controlling, regulating, or “exercising authority over others in a nation, organization or locality” (Rose, 1999, p. 15). Anticipation is a form of knowledge, deployed as a strategy, to produce particular kinds of subjects and what these subjects come to consider as important and worthy of action. Anticipatory governance

makes use of analytic procedures such as indicative snapshots, prognostic correlations, projected transformations, and phantasmagoric fictions (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021). *Indicative snapshots* draw on statistical reports and indications of current trends to narrate a future that is very much based on the present. According to Flyverbom & Garsten (2021), governance is achieved by conveying a sense of “rational, explicit and factual or experience-based decisions reacting to a stable and predictable [near] future” (p. 8). They also explain that *prognostic correlations* rely on “data-based, targeted profiling” (p. 8) to foresee actions and events in the near future. Asserting that the future can be fashioned by modifying human behaviour, governance targets “emotions, senses and visibilities” (p. 12) that can be influenced to proactively design futures. *Projected transformations* involve factual “scenarios and projections of present and future developments” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 8). Narrative and number are used as resources for the production of knowledge about the future. The “future” is “an entity that can be projected and designed at a distance” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 8). Here, uncertainty is reduced through the belief that external forces can be calibrated to “determine a more or less given future” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 8). *Phantasmagoric fictions* are fictional speculations about a distant, uncertain future which has little (if any) connection to the present. Similar to other templates, narrative, numbers, and digital traces are assembled to present predictions of possible futures, including “counter factual scenarios” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 8).<sup>3</sup>

Though often appearing neutral and objective, anticipatory activities such as the coordination and classification of knowledge resources and procedures have “looping effects” (Nelson et al., 2008, as cited in Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 2) and work as a performative force that “produce[s] a different world” (Loxley, 2007, p. 2). Whether that “different world” is desirable, and for whom, remain vexing questions. What is clear, however, is that the future is not simply “out there” to be captured, but is produced from a particular vantage point, with its own logic, interests, and priorities (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 5). It has been argued, for example, that the OECD’s ambitious *Future Forward* initiative offers a framework for curriculum design that will insert the “global” into schools worldwide and advance its own role as “a global governor of education” (Robertson, 2021, p. 1).

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3 The mobilization of the aforementioned strategies illustrates the functions of the Foucauldian “apparatus/dispositif” that is “articulated by the various institutional, physical, and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body (Larroche, 2019, p. 83).

There is little doubt that “the way one looks at the future...changes oneself and works as a mode of governance” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 5). Accordingly, we wish to draw attention to the ways in which “future logics” pervade provincial policies, informed directly by the policy imaginaries of the OECD’s *Future Forward* and *Education 2030* programs (OECD, 2018). The OECD’s ambitious initiative offers an anticipatory framework for curriculum design that ultimately “structure(s) the possible field of action” (Foucault, 1982, p. 790) for education across the country.

### **Methodology**

We employed Foucault’s genealogical method, an approach to critique that, on the basis of our “suspicions towards the objects of knowledge [e.g., policy] that we confront” (Bowman, 2007, p. 138), enables a “historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (Foucault, 1984, p. 50). We began by gathering a series of provincial and transnational policy documents, ministerial statements, and media representations—all related to provincial curriculum reforms. Drawing on the Foucauldian-inspired template for anticipatory governance (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021), we traced the history of distinct modes of reasoning about the future as they appeared chronologically through these documents. Specifically, our analysis was shaped by the following questions: What *knowledge resources*, if any, were used to guide/produce potential futures? (E.g., provincial reliance on narratives of the future, statistical representations of international achievement on standardized tests, and/or “big data” to support anticipatory governance efforts.) How were such knowledge resources *organized* and put to work, and with what temporal orientation? (E.g., government use of organizing concepts such as “competence” and their link to either distant, unknown or near-known futures.) And lastly, what were the *effects* produced? (E.g., desirable conduct of the ever-available, flexible teacher.)

This approach led to our identification of key organizing concepts—“competence” in the context of Alberta, “personalized learning” in British Columbia, and the “professional teacher” in Ontario—employed over time by each province to establish and secure systemic power relations (Cordero, 2016) among students, teachers, and the

curriculum.<sup>4</sup> While we carried out the initial analysis of our respective home provinces separately, we collaboratively revised and finalized those analyses based on written and oral feedback from one another. Using the critical frame of anticipatory governance, we crafted case studies that consider:

To what extent are any—or all—of these forms of anticipatory governance at work in provincial policies in Canada? And, if they are, to what degree does an anticipatory strategy occlude or advance disruption of the objectification of curriculum and the over-determination of teacher subjectivities?

## Case Studies

### Alberta's Future Ready Student and the Teacher Yet-to-Be

Speaking in 2008 at the launch of *Inspiring Education in Action*, Education Minister Dave Hancock invoked a futures-making meme familiar to ministers across the OECD: “We know the world is changing, and that education must change with it to prepare students for a future that none of us can predict” (Alberta Education, 2010). The government’s foundational policy framework heralded the intent to build a “competency based” curriculum for the province’s roughly 600,000 kindergarten to Grade 12 students. Informed by the education ministry’s work with the OECD, the minister’s curricular vision would be scaffolded on 10 competencies that would “transcend subject areas” to “support the development of a competencies-based, student-focused curriculum” (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 9) to achieve a vision where “students are engaged thinkers, demonstrate ethical citizenship, and develop their entrepreneurial spirit” (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 9).

While it has been 13 years since the projected transformations of the competency-based curriculum promised in *Inspiring Education in Action*, subsequent ministers of education and their governments failed to achieve the vision articulated by the OECD and its

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4 Our examination of these concepts is informed by Foucault’s (1980) notion of the *dispositif* in which the concept organizes a system of relations and is deployed strategically to respond to the perception of an “urgent need” (p. 195, emphasis in original). For each province, the selected concept defines and directs teacher subjectivity in terms of an anticipated—often threatening—future. The organizing nature of each concept (*dispositif*) is important to our analysis because as Foucault (1982) reminds us, “through the complexity and shifting mechanisms of the *dispositif*, a power relationship emerges that requires, that...the one over whom power is exercised...be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts” (p. 789).



*Future of Education and Skills 2030* project (OECD, 2015, p. 8).<sup>5</sup> Despite this, from 2010 to 2013, senior ministry officials embraced competencies as strategic leverage points for operationalizing curriculum renewal (Government of Alberta, 2013). Further, prognostic correlations were generated through the development of indicators of success for students for each competency by grade and subject area, including grade progressions mapped on hundreds of spreadsheets. This laborious and ambitious exercise attempted to produce a sense of legitimacy as numerous stakeholder committees fed the architecture of the ministry's flagship digital tools for curriculum design, branded as the "New.LearnAlberta.ca Platform"—all part of a six-year, multimillion-dollar process (Alberta Education, 2016).

Following the election of the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 2016, Education Minister David Eggen announced a broad set of reforms that re-affirmed the role of competencies as part of a cross-ministry commitment to create a "Future Ready" province—supported by an ambitious curriculum initiative where "material will be developed to teach students financial literacy, climate change, the history of Indigenous people and residential schools, and gender identity" (CBC, 2016). Since the election of the United Conservative Party in 2019, competencies (reduced from 10 to eight in 2016) now occupy a complicated place in the government's curriculum design efforts.<sup>6</sup>

By 2014 a focus on the teacher "yet-to-be" began to emerge when subsequent education ministries correlated the success of the imagined "21st century learner" with the quality of teachers and teaching. It is unsurprising to find that the cognitive investments by policy actors in the construct of the globally competent student were mirrored by policy assemblages linking student learning and "teacher quality." The role of the OECD and other influential actors in mapping the correlates of the relationship between student success and the quality of teaching have been widely documented (Robertson, 2016; Savage & Lewis, 2018; Sorensen et al., 2021; Sorensen & Robertson, 2020). One consequence has been the growing impulse to define and mobilize teaching standards across a growing number of jurisdictions including Canada (Phelan et al., 2007). Like so many fences erected to stake a claim, standards indicate the boundaries that, driven by the

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5 Alberta students in kindergarten in 2010 are graduated in 2022.

6 Space limitations do not permit a detailed chronology of the policy controversies since 2016, but these can be accessed in a comprehensive review developed by a team of Alberta-based curriculum scholars: Alberta Curriculum Analysis, 2022 (<https://alberta-curriculum-analysis.ca/>)

logic of “contract,” conjoin teaching practice (and professional autonomy) with learning outcomes (Phelan & Vintimilla, 2020). These boundaries represent recurring projections of the future teacher (a human yet to be)—another policy problem to be (re)solved to achieve the vision of *Future Ready* students.

In 2014, Minister Jeff Johnson set out to identify shortcomings in the profession and, in particular, the need to remove principals from the Alberta Teachers’ Association—a controversial recommendation of his ill-fated *Task Force for Teaching Excellence* that became the focus of vehement opposition by the Alberta Teachers’ Association and was seen as an attack on the profession (Thomas, 2013).

Despite the departure of Minister Johnson with the fall of the Conservative government and the rise of the supposedly more progressive NDP, momentum grew in positioning the teacher-as-problem given the need for the profession to engage in the imagined “transformed” curriculum. This led to an effort in 2018 to rewrite the Teacher Quality Standard, originally established in 1998. At a news conference on February 7, 2018, the newly elected NDP Minister of Education David Eggen enthused that the new “standards set a common vision for what it takes to deliver high-quality education in Alberta’s classrooms” (CBC, 2018).<sup>7</sup> These changes, which took effect September 1, 2019, also brought in three new regimes of practice standards for principals and system leaders across Alberta.

Alberta was the first Canadian province to introduce a Teaching Quality Standard. As Minister Eggen claimed, “Alberta’s education system is continually recognized as one of the best education systems in the entire world and the strength of our teaching profession is often noted as the key to our success.” The president of the Alberta Teachers’ Association “praised the province for consulting with teachers as the new standards were developed.” Arching to the superintendent standard, Michael Hauptman, Vice-President of the College of Alberta School Superintendents, extolled the benefits of correlating student and system success:

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<sup>7</sup> The new competencies are as follows: *Fostering effective relationships, engaging in career-long learning, demonstrating a professional body of knowledge, establishing inclusive learning environments, applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, and adhering to legal frameworks and policies.*

We are not aware of anywhere else in the world where there are standards for superintendents. We now have a roadmap that we can support people in looking at what kind of standards they can attain to what type of development they may need during their career path. (CBC, 2018)

Yet the road ahead has proven rather rocky, as the boosterism surrounding practice standards has given way to continued deterioration of classroom conditions and unprecedented levels of workload intensification for Alberta teachers (Ferguson, 2022).

What remains paradoxical in the present moment for Alberta teachers is that while the renewed practice standards have been in place for five years as a strategy of anticipatory governance, curriculum renewal remains stalled. For teachers now *subject to* and *subject of* the new standards of practice, the apparatus of competence “has as its major function the response to an urgency” that “is always inscribed into a play of power (Agamben, 2009, p. 2). For both Alberta students and teachers, “competency” stands as an exemplar of anticipatory governance as a “strategy for making the most of the possibilities and contingencies arising with the thickening of the global education policy field” (Sorensen, 2021, p. 585).

## **Virtual Fences and the Flexible Teacher in British Columbia**

In August 2015, the British Columbia Ministry of Education launched its plans for curriculum redesign. From the outset, the government drew on an epochal narrative that made social change “appear to be the inevitable outcome of abstract...imperatives” rather than “political choices” (Du Gay, 2003, p. 670). Explicit in its “future orientation,” the ministry’s educational vision was and continues to be at once speculative and imaginary, oriented to a distant future that is defined largely by “rapid,” “social, economic, and environmental change” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015). By distancing itself from the facticity of the present moment, and by evoking anxiety vis à vis the uncertainty of the times, the BC government’s phantasmagoric narrative of change created a sense of urgency and a space for intervention and governance.

To quell fears about uncertainty, Education Minister Rob Fleming promised that “modernizing the curriculum and graduation program will help ensure students are armed with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed” (Bains, 2018). The idea of being “armed” for “a successful lifetime where ongoing change is constant” was established

as the justification for “educational transformation” in British Columbia. Personalized learning (PL) came to represent the historical moment and the BC government’s response to it: “The givens of life are giving way to ambiguity and uncertainty; we must choose continually and live provisionally” (Melucci, 1996, p. 2). While government could not reduce uncertainty wrought by rapid change, through its education system it would enable students to attune their capacities to live with ongoing uncertainty (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 14).

Personalized learning (PL) begins from the premise “that learners should be actively, continually engaged in setting their own targets, devising their own learning plans and goals, choosing from among a range of different ways to learn” (Leadbeater, 2004, p. 16). It places a value on student agency and equips children to make “choices about which subjects to study, what settings to study in, what styles of learning to employ...a means to turn children into more engaged and motivated investors in their own education” (Leadbeater, 2005, p. 8). PL would not only offer “a greater variety of pathways to graduation,” but also “more opportunities for hands-on learning” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 11) and greater flexibility in accessing learning experiences. As a form of “differentiated curriculum” personalized learning heralded “a more inclusive approach to education, ensuring all students – regardless of ability or background – benefit from a learning environment tailored to maximize their potential” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 11).

Adopting simplistic, but easily digestible, narratives, the ministry positioned teachers as promoters of the “old” (read: impositional, prescriptive, teacher-centred) curriculum in stark opposition to the “new” (personalized) and learner-centred curriculum. In August 2016, Education Minister Mike Bernier characterized the new BC curriculum as “a curriculum moving toward ‘knowledge and deep understanding’ and away “from ‘memory and recall of facts” (Hernandez, 2016, para. 1). He explained that “the province wants to allow students the opportunity to explore different topics they are interested in while still promoting the basics, including reading, writing and arithmetic” (para. 4), noting that “the power is in B.C. teachers’ hands to come up with creative ways to adjust their curriculum to better suit the needs of the students” (para. 6). In an instant, the minister framed both the source and solution of the curriculum problem—the teacher. While the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) expressed “concerns about timing and resources” (Teri Mooring, then Vice-President of the BCTF, as quoted in Bains, 2018),

Bernier clarified that a \$7 million investment had been made to train and equip teachers to adjust to the new personalized or client-specific curriculum. The OECD publicly celebrated British Columbia as being on the vanguard of 21st-century learning and as a key partner in the OECD's *Education 2030* Project (see Gacoin, 2019)<sup>8</sup>.

PL incorporates teaching, learning, assessment, curriculum entitlement, and choice, as well as school organization and partnerships beyond the classroom (Maguire et al., 2013). While key features of the new BC curriculum include core competencies, essential learning for subject areas, and literacy and numeracy foundations, for the first time, the BC Ministry of Education was “promoting particular pedagogical approaches which, while not new, were outside of the ministry’s usual scope of responsibilities” (BCTF, 2017, p. 7). “Curriculum change” seemed to be really about “pedagogical change.” With a greater focus on process rather than content, relationship, and educational purpose (see Naylor, n.d.), the goal seems to be to combine a learning management system with “a mass, personalised learning service” (Leadbeater, 2004, pp. 71–73). While teachers remain “critically important,” their role will now be “constantly evolving to adapt to the rapidly changing context in children’s lives” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 10). The flexible teacher of personalized learning is “someone who can be enraptured by everything – as demand requires” (Masschelein & Simons, 2013, p. 124).

The British Columbia Ministry of Education’s new Policy for Student Success (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018) was established as the means to link and orient “our education system’s vision, our legislated mandate, and the work of all boards of education and independent school authorities to further student success” (p. 8). Per this policy, success would be measured not by any government action such as “amount of investment, legislature changes, the number of programs or the amount of new construction” (p. 8) but “on how well all students, regardless of their background or where they live in B.C., are succeeding in life” (p. 9). With promises of “education for all,” the policy restated its mandate “to enable every learner to maximize their potential,” thereby “maintaining its [British Columbia’s] position as a global leader in education” and “a strong, sustainable, and prosperous economy for all British Columbians” (p. 1). Echoing the World Education Forum’s concerns about fostering equity and enhancing learning en-

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8 The OECD’s admiration of British Columbia’s educational transformation was evident during an OECD event hosted by the British Columbia Ministry of Education in 2019.

vironments, the Policy for Student Success assumes a link between human potential and human capital through schooling, a position based on a range of empirical and free-market economic assumptions that are too rarely questioned (Phelan & Morris, 2021), among them notions of flexibility and choice associated with PL.

Flexibility and choice signify the beginning of a shift from a logic of enclosure—the school bell, the individual student examination—which foregrounded the brick-and-mortar school as a key site of surveillance in disciplinary societies (Foucault, 1975), to a logic of incessant control as a mechanism of “societies of control” (Deleuze, 1992). When schooling can occur at any time and any place neither teacher nor student are ever done—there is the lecture podcast to listen to while running, emails to be responded to at 6 a.m., learning platforms operative on weekends, or global webinars to attend, whatever the time zone (Lundie, 2022). As perpetual training replaces the school timetable, the previously spatialized (fenced) existence is replaced by a *virtual fence* that knows no limit, spatially or temporally.

But with flexibility and choice comes the necessity for “measurable standards” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018). In an effort to reassure the public, the policy stated: “British Columbia will endeavour to maintain our already high standards on learning outcomes...which evidence indicates offers all learners, regardless of background, the best opportunity to succeed in life and contribute to prosperous economy” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 13). Quantitative educational targets, obligatory testing of students with local Foundation Skills Assessments (FSAs) and international (PISA) tests, and publication of test results and school ranking in the *Vancouver Sun* continue to be significant features of the so-called “transformed” BC educational landscape. Contrary to initial expectations, such rationalization leads to more scientized conceptions of the educational process (e.g., standardized assessment regimes that rely on the use of technology).<sup>9</sup>

Responsiveness toward unknown futures promises a kind of agency, the capacity to bring about changes in the world. There is a sense that in responding to the future, one is offered “the power and capacity to act [or not], to make decisions and to design their futures” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 16)—but has the future already been decided?

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9 For example, learning management systems promote advanced analytics for better learning outcomes and enable tracking and projecting of student engagement and teacher adoption of the recommended technology.

The looping effects in British Columbia are considerable, since the assertion of an uncertain and rapidly changing future, which when then acted upon, thereby contributes to its realization.

### **“Kettling” Teachers in Ontario**

At first read, the history of curriculum reform in Ontario appears varied and politically complex. Another look reveals that running the fields of ever-changing political rhetoric is a sturdy narrative barrier, a “modernizing” curriculum that acts to “kettle” teachers’ subjectivity and subdue potential resistance. “Kettling” is a recent “innovation” in policing (Neal et al., 2019) in which police form a cordon to hold a group of protestors for an extended period. Rather than dispersing the crowd to diffuse a protest, kettling “sets up a bounded space for containing and potentially absorbing its energy” (Neal et al., 2019, p. 1046). This extension of the fence metaphor foregrounds the ways in which curriculum reform in Ontario has worked to contain or govern teacher subjectivities, absorbing critical agency in a “kettle” of “professional capital.” Just as the police strategy of kettling emerged as a response to the shift from relatively orderly and unified public protest to “more volatile, swarming modes of resistance” (Neal et al., 2019, p. 1047), Ontario’s curriculum, with its developing narrative of “teacher professionalism,” functions as a mechanism in governance aimed at preparing for and exerting control over an increasingly diverse, complex, and potentially threatening future.

The first decade of 30 years of curriculum reform in Ontario laid the foundation for a narrative of accountability. Data collection produced “encoded knowledge” (Blackler, 1995, as cited in Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 9) that offered a “seductive and illusory sense of clarity and precision” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 9), requiring and allowing for “little...deliberation and negotiation” (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 10). In 1993 the NDP government established a Royal Commission on Learning that aimed to produce “a coherent vision of the system, the educational programs of Ontario schools, the accountability for results, and the governance of the system” (Mutton, 1995, p. 89). Subsequent Conservative reforms included the creation of the professional, self-regulatory Ontario College of Teachers (1996), and the establishment of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), “an evidence-based research-informed organization,” that administered standardized tests to contribute “to the quality and accoun-

tability of Ontario's publicly funded education system" (EQAO, 2022, para. 1). Reforms were centralized, distanced from the classroom, aimed at province-wide accountability with direct implications for how teachers conceive of themselves and their practice. Despite perceptions of political differences, from 1986 to 2003 there is little to distinguish one government's approach from another (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2006).

McGuinty, "the education Premier," entered office in 2003 with a mandate to end the unrest in Ontario schools. His approach would focus primarily on "capacity-building." Charged with overseeing the reform, Michael Fullan described capacity-building as "strategies that systematically developed the skills, resources, and motivation of individuals and groups to put in the effort to get results, as well as to sustain that improvement effort" (Fullan, 2012, para. 4). Liberal reforms in Ontario claimed to focus on support rather than the punitive approach of the previous Conservative government.

By offering a level of autonomy to schools and boards (Boyd, 2021, p. 41), the government encouraged a particular form of agency in teachers and administrators. Framed as "professional capital," teacher agency was granted on the basis of teachers' value to the system. Support for teachers was conceived of as an *investment*—upon which a return was expected. Educational policy was seen to "stimulate [professional] capital investment" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 1) by producing the appealing teacher subjectivity of "professional educator." Functioning as a prognostic correlation, this form of anticipatory governance produces "psychological profiles" (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 10) that harness the desire of teachers to be considered and treated as professionals. In the language of the policy document *Growing Success* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), "successful implementation of policy depends on the professional judgement of educators" and "on the continuing efforts of strong and energized professional learning communities to clarify and share their understanding of policy" toward "effective implementation practices" (p. 2). Professional judgement is correlated with the successful implementation of the policy, which *depends* on all the gifts and energy that signal the professional educator. The policy names and so shapes the future it aims at by "triggering" behaviour that orients teachers toward that future (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 11). This initiates a looping effect in which the teacher comes to understand their subjectivity in terms of the conception of "professional" produced in/by the policies; their behaviour is disciplined within the limits of what the system requires.



With reform aimed at a particular future producing their professional identity, teachers are now collectively responsible for its success or failure. Subjectivity conceived as professional capital cordons off the agency of the singular teacher and undercuts the possibility of collective resistance, effectively “kettling” teachers. By holding them together in place, individual energies and potential for resistance are absorbed. Greater division is produced through an understanding of, “professional capital” as “collective responsibility, not individual autonomy” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, pp. xv–xvi) and directing teachers to be “tough on those colleagues who, after every effort and encouragement, fall short of their professional mission and let their peers as well as their students down” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, pp. xv–xvi). Wrapped in rousing, even heroic, narratives of “mission,” potential resistance to reform is deflected by turning teacher against teacher, directing them to call out those who reveal themselves to be less than “professional.”

As Fullan (2012) notes, “no system that relies primarily on external control can be sustained” (para. 7). Instead, systems must be designed in such a way that “implementers” will identify with and so take on responsibility for the monitoring and improvement of the system according to built-in measures of accountability. These “built-in” measures of accountability are achieved primarily through the introduction of language that prioritizes “the use of assessment to improve student learning and to help students become independent learners” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 30). As described by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2010), “new” knowledge about assessment necessitates a “fundamental shift” in how “teachers and students...perceive their roles in the learning process” (p. 30). Instead of the traditional—now unprofessional—approach of “determining goals and criteria for successful achievement, delivering instruction, and evaluating student achievement at the end of a period of learning” (p. 30), teachers must instead understand themselves as “lead learners,” working collaboratively with students, each “playing an active role in setting learning goals, developing success criteria, giving and receiving feedback, monitoring progress, and adjusting learning strategies” (p. 30). Seemingly progressive, this policy activates “teacher professionalism,” constructing teachers as responsible for facilitating a collaborative, emergent process narratively oriented toward individualized but indeterminant and future-oriented notions of “learning goals” and “success criteria.”

According to the OECD, directly quoted in *Growing Success*, in this future “globalisation and modernisation are creating an increasingly diverse and interconnected

world” such that “the competencies that individuals need to meet their goals have become more complex, requiring more than the mastery of certain narrowly defined skills” (OECD, 2003, as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, pp. 12–13). Oriented toward the powerful forces of “globalization and modernisation” shaping our futures, the task of the teacher, then, is to collaborate with students in the acquisition of knowledge and skills that will prepare them “to be agile and responsive” to an array of shifting, but “plausible” futures (Flyverbom & Garsten, 2021, p. 14). These projected transformations produce a paradoxical loop of instrumental confidence in present moment rational policies and planning to provide for a future that can only be guessed at within the scope of shifting and uncertain possibilities. With “tomorrow” an ever-moving target, teachers double down on what they can control “today,” with the vague hope that they will help students “succeed” in becoming responsive to a perpetually deferred future—thereby fulfilling their “professional” responsibilities.

In March of 2019 the current Conservative government released the policy backgrounder “Education that Works for You: Modernizing Learning” (Government of Ontario, 2019). Focusing on fundamentals framed as “basic concepts and skills,” the government promises curriculum reform that will focus on “everyday” problems to “ensure” “students’ employability for the jobs of tomorrow” (para. 3). In sum: a modernizing, back-to-basics approach legitimated by connections to concrete problems that will foster the innovative thinking necessary to guarantee employment in an unknown tomorrow. While challenging typical sense-making, proposed changes express the “get it done” (Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, n.d.) spirit of this government. Coming out of a period stalked by the threatening uncertainty of a pandemic, people may reasonably be eager for a few simple fences to provide even the illusion of taming an uneasy landscape. Relying on the immediacy of data-driven accountability, current educational policy in Ontario focuses on taking stock of the moment and doing what the public will easily understand as necessary to get things back on track. Regardless, none of the ham-fisted changes brought about over the past four years would have been possible in the absence of almost a quarter of a century of anticipatory governance mechanisms playing out across the political spectrum.

## **Concluding Remarks**

As a process of futures-making, curriculum should be regarded as one of the fundamental conditions of teachers' practice (Couture, 2017). Yet, the profession remains blocked from substantially influencing the curriculum redesign process and contributing to naming the many possible futures of schools (Biesta, 2016, p. 83). The provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario embrace the policy language of the global "education for all" movement, wherein each and every globalized student is touted as having the same rights, protections, and responsibilities (i.e., to be educated) (Block & Swadener, 2009). Organized via concepts of competence, personalized learning, and the professional teacher, such universal prescriptions appear beneficial while reinscribing "segregated practices, exclusionary thinking, and omitting critical questions that need to be continually asked" (Block & Swadener, 2009, p. 7). Education for all learners suggests monolithic notions about what is to be taught (i.e., curriculum competencies), by whom (i.e., professional teachers and parents as partners), and how (i.e., via personalized learning) and reinforces a notion of world schooling with human capital as the unquestioned and unquestionable outcome.

World schooling is facilitated by international non-governmental organizations like the OECD that promote a shared cultural understanding of student achievement as a measurement of individuals, which can then be compared across students provincially and internationally, promoting the idea that such measurement is crucial for advancing goals of educational equity, progress, and justice. In this way, important and complex conversations enriched by a multiplicity of "cultural ways of knowing" (Furuta, 2022, p. 6) are in danger of being reduced to rhetoric intended to help the state perpetuate its own existence. Attempts to structure schooling around "a forever changing world" reflect a broader set of changing global norms and institutional structures, newly legitimated types of actors, and new ways to frame the cultural meaning of social problems. When taken together, the cumulative and aggregate effects of these changes contribute to an institutional context that may produce social change, but not necessarily justice.

In the three Canadian provinces discussed in this article, a future orientation has enabled educational leaders to foreground competencies and skills that, it is argued, can equip youth to adapt to emerging circumstances. But surely the question of adaptation must be preceded by the question of whether youth should adapt, or whether resistance

or refusal might be the better options. Moreover, the question of rapid, uncertain change seems to overlook the well-known issues that continue to require our attention: reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settlers, climate change, social inequity, and homelessness, to name a few. One could argue that education is not about the future, but about the present, and that it “*takes place in the here and now*” (Biesta, 2021, p. 11, emphasis in original). There is an urgency that pertains to the present that requires teachers to help students face present realities, to consider the past that got us here, and—rather than reacting to a singular veiled future, decided for us in advance—to imagine futures together.

Historically, fencing was a spatial strategy to control territory. Educationally, fencing continues to take governmental forms (e.g., anticipatory governance) that keeps schooling firmly within the bounds of rational state regulation and order. While we recognize the role of the state in the educational conversation, we assert that teachers must be keen and informed participants, not only with regard to “what knowledge is of most worth” (Pinar, 2015, p. 32)—as was the case in British Columbia—but also in advocating for “the conditions that would support curriculum implementation” (Gacoin, 2018, p. 37). Global and state initiatives vis à vis curriculum and pedagogy are designed to curb the emergence of local educational aims and approaches—hardly desirable in a democracy. Equipped with the latest technology and patrolled by extra-territorial mechanisms such as PISA, fences materialize arbitrary boundaries between provinces and nation states, imposing Western ideas of fixed and impassable boundaries onto the educational landscape. We ask: At what cost?

Fencing continues. Today in Alberta standards continue to be mobilized to frame teachers’ practice for a “Future Ready” curriculum that has yet to be developed and implemented. Further exacerbating this irreconcilable policy gap is the continual marginalization of the teaching profession and a refusal to develop policy informed by research (den Heyer, 2021). In British Columbia a chilling level of self-monitoring by students is evident in the emphasis on “student self-assessment of the Core Competencies and goal-setting at all grades” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2022). Dressed in the futuristic imaginaries of technology-assisted learning, in Ontario efforts continue to lean heavily on the notion of the “professional teacher” who now, in a bitter irony, works toward their own erasure by implementing mandatory online asynchronous courses.

Given the precarity of our current global moment (Jagodzinski, 2017), we might reasonably describe teachers as trying to inhabit, with students and their school-commu-

nities, a “wilderness of uncertainty” (Ramírez & Ravetz, 2011, p. 479).<sup>10</sup> This conception of the future fuels the anxiety of our current moment, driving us to double down on efforts to mitigate uncertainty by deploying teachers and curriculum to convey to students limited and limiting notions of what is possible. But it might yet also serve to remind us that “resistance is always possible, and that power is never totalizing” (Frost, 2019, p. 162); that a restriction, or fence, might draw attention to the possibility of freedom in our classrooms and beyond. To contest curriculum policies that ultimately stymie and restrict teacher agency is to ask after the possibility of other ways home, other forms of governance, other ways of deploying resources, other ways of thinking about education, and other orientations to life in the present and in the future.

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<sup>10</sup> A terrain of contested curricular debates across the landscape of contemporary education policy amidst ongoing colonial violence, a climate crisis, and a pandemic.

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