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"Knowledge emerges only through invention
and re-invention, through the restless,
impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry
human beings pursue in the world, with the
world, and with each other."

Paulo Freire

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What to Teach? How to Teach?

Curriculum, Ethics, Freire, and the Teaching of English

Carlo Ricci

As English teachers, the more we know about the history of curriculum, the better prepared we become to deliberate and take ownership of what goes on in our classrooms. Therefore, in this article I will outline various ways of looking at and thinking about curriculum in order to help classroom teachers reflect on and place themselves within a particular paradigm or paradigms. The hope is that through reflection teachers can better understand and position themselves within a particular discourse, thereby empowering themselves and ultimately improving their teaching. I will begin by examining various approaches to curriculum studies and then outline my ethic of reading that includes a social participatory democratic position inspired by Paulo Freire. Finally, I offer the position I have come to embrace.

Understanding Curriculum Issues

In *What is Curriculum?*, Kieran Egan (1978) outlines the history of curriculum as being a battle between what should be taught in schools versus how teaching should proceed. Egan argues that the small, gradual, metaphorical shift in the meaning of the word "curriculum" over the last two millennia attests to it being relatively stable and clear. In other words, dealing with curriculum issues meant addressing the question of what should be taught (Egan, 1978, p. 67). However, he explains that something has happened to confuse and disrupt this stability: "I think we can best trace its source to the development in influence over the last two centuries of a second curriculum question: How should things be taught?" (Egan, 1978, p. 67). One result of the shift in emphasis from "what" to "how" is that it "led to focusing on the individual learner as an important variable" (Egan, 1978, p. 69). He goes on to say that:

Thus individual differences, in styles of learning, ability to learn, developmental stages, interests, socioeconomic background, and so on had to be taken into account before one could begin to specify what the curriculum should contain." (1978, p. 69)

Egan laments that one problem with introducing the "how" question into curriculum inquiry is that curriculum study no longer exists as a distinctive field and that one can claim to be doing anything in education and still claim to be working on curriculum. In other words, Egan says that once the "how" question is introduced, curriculum inquiry becomes educational inquiry. "Both properly address the what and how questions together and deal with all the ramifications of trying to answer, 'What should children learn, in what sequence, and by what methods?'" (Egan, 1978, p. 70). He concludes that what we need to do is focus on the "what" question and present strong arguments for or against curriculum content in order to help our children better prepare for the future. If we do not, he warns that, "While we ponder how questions[,] another child has learned two things where our children have learned none, and our educational backsides remain bare" (Egan, 1978, p. 71). Suffice it to say that I believe Egan's conclusion is too strong, however, I am not interested in a detailed critique of his conclusion at this point, but merely in gaining a better understanding of the debates that have had an impact on curriculum studies.

Another debate that Egan identifies as being part of the history of curriculum is between whether students themselves or an external body should choose the curriculum to which students are exposed.

In *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Neil Postman (1996) introduces us to yet another interesting dilemma with which curriculum theorists have been contending. Postman argues that public education "depends absolutely on the existence of shared narratives and the exclusion of narratives that lead to alienation and divisiveness" (p. 17). He goes on to argue that the reason for having common goals is that education does not serve a public, but creates a public. And if schools can create the right kind of public, they will strengthen the American Creed. Of course, at the other end of Postman's shared narratives is a curriculum that

values fluidity and allows for the teaching of narratives that are defined locally, rather than a shared imposed narrative. At the extreme, E. D. Hirsh lists thousands of items that define cultural literacy and all that American students need to know. It is only fair to point out that Postman devotes considerable effort to critiquing Hirsh.

Of course no discussion of curriculum is complete without the mention of the hidden curriculum. In The Way Schools Work: A Sociological Analysis of Education, Kathleen B. deMarrais and Margaret D. LeCompte (1995) define how Jackson used the term “hidden curriculum to describe implicit messages to convey ‘appropriate’ values, beliefs and behaviors to children” (1995, p.14). They offer examples of how schools teach behaviours that are needed in the labour market by encouraging students to keep busy, complete their work neatly, come to school on time, and wait quietly. An interesting point that they reveal about the hidden curriculum is how it conveys different messages to children of different social class, ethnicity, and gender. They argue, for example, that:

Lower and working-class children are socialized to accept authority, to be punctual, to wait, and to be compliant, while middle-class children learn to assume roles of responsibility, authoritative modes of self-presentation and independent work habits. (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1995, p. 14)

Not surprisingly, the hidden curriculum is not always unintentional (DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995, p. 207).

Another decision that reflects the values of an educational body is whether that body values a *bottom-up* approach that gives the teacher a major role in making decisions, versus a *top-down* approach that limits a teacher’s role (Ornstein and Hunkins, p. 25). Another position on a similar theme to the one above is postulated by William E. Doll, Jr. (1993) in his book A Postmodern Perspective on Curriculum. In it, he asks us to consider curriculum as a matrix, consistent with Dewey’s idea of mind as a verb. He says that, “...a constructive curriculum is one that emerges through the action and interaction of the participants; it is not one set in advance (except in broad and general terms)”

(1993, p. 162). He goes on to say that a curriculum modelled on a matrix is nonlinear and nonsequential, “but bounded and filled with intersecting foci and related webs of meaning” (1993, p. 162) that emerge through the interaction and action of the participants. This is a more fluid view than the one outlined by Ornstein and Hunkins (1993). In other words, Doll argues for curriculum to allow for Dewey’s brilliant observation that plans arise from action and are modified through action. For example, lesson plans and purposes can be written in a general, loose, and indeterminate manner, since, as the lesson proceeds, “specificity becomes more appropriate and is worked out conjointly – among teacher, text, and student” (Doll, 1993, pp. 170-171).

Many theorists have divided curriculum up in various ways in order to try to better understand curriculum studies. DeMarrais and LeCompte, for instance, make the distinction between traditional curriculum theory and sociology of curriculum. DeMarrais and LeCompte quote Giroux, who summarizes the assumptions made by traditional curriculum theorists:

Theory in the curriculum field should operate in the interest of lawlike propositions that are empirically testable; (b) the natural sciences provide the “proper” model of the explanation for the concepts and techniques of curriculum theory design and evaluation; (c) knowledge should be objective and capable of being investigated and described in a neutral fashion; and (d) statements of value are to be separated from “facts” and “modes of inquiry” that can and ought to be objective. (1995, p. 195)

So they assume that knowledge is given, objective, and free from bias. In terms of the “how” versus the “what” questions that we examined in Egan, traditional curriculum theorists are interested in the how questions.

In contrast, DeMarrais and LeCompte tell us that those who are sympathetic to the sociology of curriculum see knowledge not as objective, but as constructed by humans, and therefore value-laden. They consider knowledge to be power, and those in power can choose to value certain types of knowledge over other types. Along similar lines, power can play a role in deciding on another important distinction that DeMarrais and LeCompte draw; namely, the distinction

between horizontal differentiation and vertical differentiation. The former refers to the number of disciplines in which courses are offered, such as the inclusion of vocational programs; the latter refers to the number of levels in which courses are offered, such as advanced, general, and remedial.

Ornstein and Hunkins (1993) outline Wiles and Bondi's six different designs used to distinguish curriculum:

- (1) conservative-liberal arts designs, which emphasize knowledge and intellectual pursuits;
- (2) educational technology design, which focus on goals and ends, objectivity, and efficiency;
- (3) humanistic designs, which propose student-centered curricula;
- (4) vocational designs, which are concerned with vocational and economic aspects of schooling;
- (5) social-reconstruction designs, which are aimed at social improvement of society; and
- (6) deschooling designs, which emphasize the de-emphasis of formal schooling. (p. 18)

This is yet another way of trying to make sense of the complex, dynamic field of curriculum studies. The assumption is that the curriculum design followed by a particular body reflects that body's values.

In the introduction to Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum, editors Elliot W. Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance outline five orientations to curriculum as well as offer other insightful ways that curriculum has traditionally been divided: (1) The developmental cognitive approach, which is concerned with the refinement of intellectual operations; (2) Curriculum of technology, which is concerned not with the process of knowing or learning (which the cognitive process is interested in), but with the technology by which knowledge is communicated; (3) Self-actualization, or curriculum as consummatory experience, which is a child-centered approach concerned with the child's personal liberation and development; (4) Social reconstruction-relevance, which is concerned with societal needs over individual needs; and (5) Academic rationalism, which is concerned with teaching students traditional western canon. Although Eisner does not focus on the following orientations, I will mention

them here because his outline of them leads us to better understand curriculum studies. For instance, (1) the distinction between child-centered and society-centered; (2) value or moral education versus skills training and the three R's; and (3) present 'lived in' experience that sees curriculum as an end, versus seeing curriculum as a means to some future goal. Referring to Eisner and Vallance, Colin Marsh and George Willis (c. 1995) argue in Curriculum: Alternative Approaches, Ongoing Issues that, "Some textbook writers on curriculum attempt to classify theories and theorizing in order to explain to their readers the relationships between different theoretical principles and the resulting school practices" (81).

Marsh and Willis neatly divide 20th century education in America into a competition between subject-centered, person-centered, and society-centered education (c.1995, p. 73). Along similar lines, Brian Holmes and Martin McLean (1989) in The Curriculum: A Comparative Perspective draw a distinction among the three most influential European curriculum theories: epistemological, psychological, and political/sociological (p. 7). It is interesting to note the parallel among Marsh and Willis', and Holmes and McLean's distinctions. Another useful distinction that can be used to discuss curriculum is the one Marsh and Willis draw among planned curriculum, enacted curriculum, and experienced curriculum (p. 104).

In the midst of these various ways of dividing curriculum studies, Joseph Schwab (1969) reminds us in The Practical: A Language for Curriculum of the complexity of defining curriculum into mutually exclusive orientations. He argues:

A curriculum based on theory about individual personality, which thrusts society, its demands and its structure, far into the background or ignores them entirely, can be nothing but incomplete and doctrinaire, for the individuals in question are in fact members of a society and must meet its demands to some minimum degree since their existence and prosperity as individuals depend on the functioning of their society. In the same way, a curriculum grounded only in a view of social need

or social change must be equally doctrinaire and incomplete, for societies do not exist only for their own sakes but for the prosperity of their members as individuals as well. (p. 9)

The above discussion is intended to show the dynamic and complex field that is curriculum. Members of each of these fields have different ideas about what should be taught, to whom, when, and how (Marsh & Willis, c. 1995, p. 81). Yet among the different ways of semantically dividing curriculum studies, there are obvious commonalities.

Teaching Secondary English

This section focusses on some approaches to literacy and their implications for teaching English. In On the Demise of Subjectivity and Educational Inquiry, Thomas E. Barone (1992) argues that the field of literary criticism has taken a pragmatist or neo-pragmatist turn that honours Dewey's view of "reality." According to this view, "'Reality' resides neither within an objective external world nor within the subjective mind of the knower, but within dynamic transactions between the two" (Barone, 1992, p. 31). So unlike the formalist critiques that viewed a text as an "object-in-the-world," Barone tells us that textualists in the reader-response and post-structuralist schools do not. Instead, these theorists view the reader as actively constructing reality rather than following cues that lead the reader to the "correct" reading of the text. Post-structuralist theorists reject the notion that texts are stable, fixed windows on the world that represent objective reality.

Barone goes on to point out formalist and structural critiques such as Northrop Frye's distinction between two types of language: "(1) Centrifugal, or cognitive-scientific discourse, moves outwards from words to "real world" objects. (2) But Centripetal, or poetic-literary discourse, collapses inward into the internal imaginative realm of human meaning, rendering it objectively false but subjectively true" (1992, p. 33). Barone argues that the former is considered objective, instructive, and useful by these theorists, while the latter is considered subjective and admirable, yet useless.

My Position

Clearly, given all of the literary (for instance, Formalism, Structuralism, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Post-Structuralism, Feminism, Historicism, Post-Coloniality, and Cultural Studies) and curricular approaches (outlined above) available, this leaves a classroom teacher with a lot to think about in terms of what approach or approaches to adopt. Throughout graduate school, I have had the privileged opportunity to reflect on my practice, for which I am humbly grateful. In attempting to find a position that I feel passionate about, I read voraciously. I read numerous writers from various philosophical schools (phenomenological, structural, postmodern, pragmatic, constructionism, and so on) with the hope of finding a position from which to spring. I found that I kept coming back to the works of critical theorists: Roger Simon, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Peter McLaren, bell hooks, and others. In addition to these, the one critical theorist that I found myself reading and constantly revisiting was Paulo Freire, and in particular his argument for the importance of praxis focussing on students' lived experience, and literacy as reading the word and the world. After much reflection, my purpose has become to challenge the current direction of Ontario's educational directives, and to offer a participatory social democratic approach as an alternative. I am advocating an approach to teaching English literacy at the secondary level largely inspired by the spirit and thinking of Paulo Freire. His insight has led me to understand that literacy is not merely being able to read and write words, nor merely syllabification, nor merely the learning of mechanical skills. Literacy is being able to read the word and the world. It is the ability to engage in praxis – reflection and action. Teaching English at the secondary level, therefore, needs to include the ability to read the word and the world, to be able to understand a reading of the status quo, and to be able to challenge it, thereby transforming society. Ultimately, the goal in teaching literacy is the melioration of society, in part, by striving toward the elimination of discrimination against those who are being oppressed due to class, race, sexual orientation, sex, globalization, and so on. By a reading of the word and the world, teachers

need to direct students by engaging them in dialogue and reflection in a comfortable environment where both teachers and students feel free to speak, participate, and learn. The hope in offering this approach is not to offer a "recipe" for teaching English at the secondary level, but to share the gift, understanding, and spirit that Freire's thinking has given to me, with others.

Freire gave me the confidence and courage to take his ideas and use them for my own purpose, within my own context. His writing and ideas in Teachers as Cultural Workers (1998) made me feel not only comfortable, but also encouraged and inspired to do what Freire expresses as a re-creating and rewriting of his ideas (p. xi). In their foreword to Freire's Teachers as Cultural Workers, Donaldo Macedo and Ana Maria Araujo Freire quote a piece of a long conversation that Freire had with Macedo on the topic of importing and exporting methodology. Freire says, "Donaldo, I don't want to be imported or exported. It is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them. Please tell your fellow American educators not to import me. Ask them to re-create and rewrite my ideas" (p. xi).

Recall that Freire insists that literacy is not about syllabification. In Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World (1987), Freire writes that literacy should be about "discussing the national realities with all its difficulties...of raising the issue of the people's political participation in the reinvention of their society..." (p. 66). So, just as Freire used the peasant's real life experiences in order to teach them about literacy of the word and the world, so we can extend his concept and teach our students about literacy by appealing to their real life experiences. In a chapter in his work on literacy entitled, "The People Speak Their Word: Literacy in Action," Freire gives an example of emancipatory literacy in practice. The chapter is about adult literacy in the context of the republic of Sao Tome and Principe. The texts used to teach adult literacy here are the Popular Culture Notebooks (Freire tells us that this is a generic name given to a series of books and primers). By examining a few passages in the text, the political nature of the text quickly becomes apparent. It is worth noting that Freire insists that all teaching is political and that teaching in a directive way is not problematic; it

is only when teaching is done in an authoritarian and manipulative way that it becomes problematic. The following are some sample passages from the texts:

We all know something. We are all ignorant of something. For this reason, we are always learning.

Let's read, think, and discuss.

Working with perseverance, we produce more. Producing more, on the land that is ours, we create riches for the happiness of the people.

With the MLSTP (Liberation Movement of Soa Tome and Principe) we are building a society in which everyone participates for the well-being of all. We need to be watchful against those who are trying to bring back the system of exploitation of the majority by a dominant minority.

Now try to write about what you read and discussed.

(Freire, 1987, p. 72)

And,

Let's read.

We become independent at the cost of many sacrifices. With unity, discipline, and work we are consolidating our independence. We repel those who are against us and we gather together those who demonstrate their solidarity with us.

You the colonists, you were wrong to think that your power of exploitation was eternal. For you, it was impossible to believe that the weak, exploited masses would become a force in the struggle against your power.

You took with you almost everything that was ours, but you couldn't take with you our determined will to be free.

Maria, Julieta, and Carlos – they struggled to increase production. They always bring with them the certainty of victory.

We, us, with us.
You, you, with you.
They, they, themselves, to themselves,
of themselves, for themselves, with
themselves, to them, them, them.

Write sentences with:

Us, to them, with us.

(Freire, 1987, p. 73)

The political nature and messages championed in these passages are poignant examples of how, in teaching literacy, the approach is not academic, utilitarian, cognitive development, nor romantic, but definitively emancipatory.

In conclusion, after deliberating on the various approaches to curriculum studies and the various approaches to literacy, just like in the Popular Culture Notebooks, I wish to propose the need to focus on an emancipatory literacy that begins with the students' everyday lived experiences

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