Curriculum Studies Handbook – The Next Moment

Edited by
Erik Malewski

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Erik Malewski

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Preface

This Handbook addresses the question, What is the work of the post-reconceptualization generation(s) in curriculum studies? It marks the first deliberate effort to delineate the shift toward the post-reconceptualization of curriculum studies using inter- and intragenerational conversations to un(map) the next moments in the field. Showcasing the work of newer scholars to provide understanding of where the field is currently and where it might be heading, across the arch of the Handbook is the juxtaposition of the work of newer academicians who offer fresh perspectives on the field positioned in relation to essays from longtime scholars who reveal the historic and current motivations for their intellectual work.

The idea for this volume originated at the 2006 Purdue conference, *Articulating (Present) Next Moments in Curriculum Studies: The Post-Reconceptualization Generation(s).* The aim of this conference was to engender intellection on the state of the field through 10 keynotes from scholars newer to curriculum studies (mostly assistant professors) and intra- and intergenerational conversations through an equal number of response essays (one per keynote) given by scholars with a longer history in the field. As the reader might already recognize, to speak of inter- and intragenerational dialogues is not to imply agreement or synthesis. Response essays both inspired and troubled keynote speakers.[1] Similarly, break-out sessions sprinkled throughout the conference schedule to encourage informal discussions and inform those who were new to the field about historical debates and intellectual traditions that underwrite keynote papers, facilitated by key scholars in the field, were interpreted differently. Graduate students and newer faculty found them particularly effective while attendees with a longer history in the field wished for more detailed and challenging discussions. By far the most memorable event for many in attendance was the third day of the conference when concerns over race, representation, knowledge production, and ethical commitments were brought to the surface by a number of attendees. The conference program gave way to impromptu discussions, debates, and arguments over what constituted legitimate work in curriculum studies, as well as issues of academic elitism, cultural alienation, and language differences. While few in attendance will forget some of the heated exchanges and accusations of failure brought against the field, what was most unsettling was the incommensurability of viewpoints that became increasingly evident the longer discussions ensued. It would be safe to say that while eventually the original program was reinstated, the breakdown not only changed the tone for the rest of the conference but, along with other breakdowns like it, became a source of debate over the extent to which the field is open to historically subjugated perspectives, ideas, and people.

While it might be hard to determine whether the highlight was one of the intellectually engaging papers, informal conversations with colleagues, or the opportunity to gather with other curriculum scholars to speculate on how the field might change in the future,

what has become most fascinating for me in the intervening 2 years involves the range of interpretations that have been offered by attendees on the breakdown that occurred that third day. Some scholars felt that starting the conference with an introduction to the history of curriculum studies, including key scholarship on race, class, and gender issues, might have helped avoid the breakdown. Others saw the breakdown as further evidence of identity politics and the sorts of debates that—lodged in the authenticity of group experience—result in infighting among progressive scholars and balkanization of the field. Still others saw it as evidence that reconceptualization scholarship has yet to make it into the schools or that the field has yet to adequately address the theory–practice divide. In contrast, some found the breakdown a fruitful site for producing and learning differently without necessarily overcoming differences and dissensus on the way toward a reductionist, common sensibility about next moments in the field. This last group seemed to find promise in letting differences surface, engaging in debates over the merits of different viewpoints and theoretical frameworks, and letting those differences stand without a rush toward a conclusion so as to advance the field. Instead, they found the challenges to the character of the scholarship and the conference program to be expected in terms of the myriad of theoretical clusters that make up the field, each operating with different assumptions, outlooks, and histories. Equally telling, after analyzing these different interpretations of the breakdown, I came away with a sense of how the very question of the status of the field illuminates how words and phrases such as *curriculum* and *post-reconceptualization* are less established sites of shared understanding than contested sites in which politics play out and struggles over meaning occur. To borrow an idea from Snaza's chapter in this volume, when it comes to attempts to capture the status of the field, we are only beginning to learn how to pose the question of the state.

After the conference was over I quickly went to work on putting together a collection of essays that kept with the original theme, what is the work of the post-reconceptualization generation(s)? More specifically, a question that I first asked in 2004 after noticing a series of presentations, articles, and book chapters speculating on the direction of the field after reconceptualization, which turned into the 2006 Purdue conference, then became the impetus for inviting 17 scholars to join the 10 scholars who presented at the conference in authoring chapters and inviting 13 additional scholars to craft the additional response essays. I recognized putting together a collection of essays that spoke to the state of the field was going to be tricky, possibly trickier than acting as chair of the conference. In soliciting contributions, I tried to attend to issues of intellectual diversity as well as diversity in scholarly backgrounds and identities, from the usual issues one might consider in terms of race, class, gender, sexual identity, and so on, to less usual issues of intellectual and organizational affiliations and region while not losing sight of the purpose of the text.

Certainly the intention of this volume is not a comprehensive survey of the field, as was the aim with Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman's (1995) *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction of Historical and Contemporary Curricular Discourses.* Neither is this collection an effort to represent the entire field as it is (without our own agendas) as opposed to how those associated with this collection wish it to be. Rather, the aim here is to offer tentative orientations toward the next moment in the field for scholars and scholarship that comes after the reconceptualization movement. Our agendas and desires are evident in every chapter and response essay. As something less than polemical and more than an exchange of ideas, this collection proceeds with the conviction that the continued dominance of neoliberal, neoconservative, and developmental discourses is a bad thing. What constitutes these discourses, however, is a source of debate and contention. That its effects upon schools, the public's concept of curriculum, and notions of credible

educational research must be challenged is not. This is not a choice contributors to this collection made just prior to its publication. Instead, it is work at the dynamic, tension-ridden site of post-reconceptualization that is our inheritance; it is what becomes us and what we struggle toward. Out of our ethical commitments the range of possibilities follow: That there be spaces for traditionalists, empiricists, and developmentalist discourses regardless of the extent to which such ideas need to be challenged, but that such work be displaced so as to break up sedimentary conjunctions, epistemological dominance, to open spaces where a thousand theories and stories are made and unmade, where alternative feasible readings proliferate.

Why focus upon inter- and intragenerational conversations? First, my aim here in presenting curriculum studies in general and post-reconceptualization in particular as contested sites involves moving away from traditional representations of the field and toward juxtapositions of perspectives in order to incite a multiplicity of possible readings, ones that allow for moving along different registers of thought and against grand unifying theories. Here the work of chapter authors sits in conversation with response essays in ways that might offer openings to a broader range of viewpoints than if chapters where not juxtaposed with responses. Second, in referencing inter- and intragenerational conversations the hope is to destabilize the notion of generations of curriculum scholars either wholly rebelling against the previous generation or wholly writing in their shadows. One will notice that many scholars newer to the field are chapter authors while many scholars with longer histories in the field respond to and contextualize their orientations and theories. Also, some chapter authors are set in intragenerational dialogue with response essay writers who have unique perspectives but are possibly of the same generation or closely linked in terms of length of time working in curriculum studies respectively. As something other than repudiating history or continuing on state unchanged, the idea behind the structure of this text is to disrupt the notion that next moments in the field belong to a single generation or that post-reconceptualization necessarily be interpreted as that which comes after reconceptualization, that such terms be locked in hierarchical relationships rather than opened up to play, contestations, and as of yet unknown meanings.[2] As I hope to illustrate in the introduction, delineating what is inside and outside curriculum and the field of curriculum studies is not only difficult business, fraught with problems, but it might not be as useful in assessing the field along two key registers of thought: (1) whether we are responsible and accountable only to the issues and concerns of powerful epistemological forces or those marginalized, subjugated, and distorted, and (2) whether we are committed to only circulating new languages, concepts, and ideas within the field or out, across, and along various lines of discourse to reach variously situated publics, educators, and intellectuals.

Lastly, situating scholars newer to the field as the majority of chapter authors and scholars with longer histories in the field as response essayists is not an attempt to upstage more established scholars or lay claim to post-reconceptualization as the terrain of a younger generation. Instead, what might be a standard convention of the academy to seek the input of longstanding members of a field on important themes and issues is troubled by the effort to highlight the orientations and ideas of scholars who are for the most part earlier in their careers. And, in continuing this vein of thought, to ask senior scholars who might be thought of as experts in the field to read and reflect upon the ideas and perspectives of newer scholars. While the reader can judge the effectiveness of this inversion, this is an attempt to theorize in the organization of this text the qualities of difficult knowledge, those ideas and concepts which evoke surprise, curiosity, and wonder. This is in contrast to what might be termed easy knowledge, or structures for organizing texts that register as expectations met and conventions fulfilled.

The former confronts the reader with something different from what they think they want from a text while the latter functions only to fulfill what has been in terms of what the reader believes they will find in the organization of a state of the field handbook. In this sense, the hope is to extend beyond restrictive representations toward a sort of vacillation between a range of traditions, perspectives, and ideas brought to the reader for consideration. Here irony, juxtaposition, and not knowing as a way of knowing become the very force of learning. It is my desire that in this differently organized text what one knows when easy knowledge is no longer possible becomes the promise of thinking with and through curriculum studies in a different state.

What does all this mean for students reading this book? For students who are new to the curriculum field this might seem like an unruly text, a chaotic collection that offers few guideposts by which to find one's way. This is the reality of contemporary curriculum studies, an interdisciplinary field less continuous and coherent than discontinuous and fractured. Fifteen years ago it might have been appropriate to identify discourses by way of gender, race, political, poststructural, aesthetics, autobiography, theology, and so on, in the field. Since then much has changed. Cultural studies, critical race theory, and critical geography have entered the field. Discourses that might in the past have been distinguishable have made their way into hybrid spaces that make their unique characteristics indeterminable. Queer theory, place, autobiography, and Southern studies combine to make the work of Ugena Whitlock, for example. Similarly, Denise Taliaferro-Baszile brings together autobiography, critical race theory, and postpositivism to carve out a unique onto-epistemological space within the field. Others have shifted theoretical lenses to shed new light on familiar topics. Howard and Tappan move from a focus on poverty within political curriculum theory to highlight the nature of privilege and identity, effectively challenging cultural deficit theories focused on the poor by highlighting the pathologies of the elite. McKnight employs Kierkegaard's notions of despair and passionate inwardness to reconfigure a space within critical pedagogy to deal with the contradictions between existential becoming and restrictive educational environments. Still others have illustrated that there remains many understudied and unstudied topics within curriculum history. Ann Winfield employs eugenic ideology to examine a difficult past, Bernadette Baker illustrates how mesmeric studies informed the concepts that have come to matter so much to the curriculum field, and LaVada Brandon offers an alternate reading of Carter G. Woodson.

I could continue on with descriptions of how the field has changed but the work of these scholars is explored in more depth in the introduction. The point is that the scholarship of the contemporary field represents an increasingly complex and eclectic range of backgrounds and interests with scholars producing knowledge that combines ethical commitments with various theories to take up unique positions in the field. Furthermore, few scholars in the contemporary field seek to identify the traditions that inform their work or seek out consolidation or consensus in ways that easily allow for insertion into a broader typography. This is not to suggest there are no through-lines that might draw dimensions of different scholars' work into relationship (seven are offered in the introduction). Rather, it means for new curriculum students that studying historical movements, debates, and theories has become even more paramount to understanding the contemporary state of the field. The rapid rate of change and increasingly complex nature of curriculum studies also requires giving up on knowledge we can grab hold of in any complete sense to embrace proliferations, tensions, and discontinuities. As new students become more familiar with the field and all of its dimensions, they might do well to trace their own course of study through crafting personal, conceptual montages at the crossroads of the scholarship they study and their personal experiences with it.

Note

1. While many examples might be given, Ellen Brantlinger's response to Guillory's keynote was particularly memorable for the ways it troubled audience members, as well as the keynoter. Largely unchanged from the chapter here, Guillory presented a paper that examined Black female rap as pedagogy, with particular attention to issues of sexuality, power, and same and opposite gender relationships. Brantlinger's response focused on, among other topics, the trouble she had with the notion that explicit sexual lyrics become a part of school curriculum or topics of discussion between teachers and high school students. Audience members at different points interrupted Brantlinger's talk and challenged her positions. Their remarks highlighted concern for Brantlinger's categorical distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable topics of discussion, that the ideas and concepts reflected in the lyrics were already a part of the language, repertoire, and life world of the students regardless of whether Brantlinger felt comfortable or willing to acknowledge it. At moments like these, one might suggest evidence of a generational divide became evident during the conference.
2. Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, in his article entitled "Representing Curriculum" in a special issue of the *Journal of Curriculum Inquiry* (2009) focused on *The Sage Handbook of Curriculum and Instruction* (Connelly, He, and Phillion), contrasts that handbook with this one. He finds that while both produce curriculum and pedagogy as expanding and changing, Connelly and colleagues portray those changes as continuing past traditions and as bounded or coherent. In this collection, he suggests different assumptions are made. That is, the curriculum field is represented as chaotic, layered, and discontinuous, as more of a mosaic than a linear line of progression. I find his assessment insightful.

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Gaztambide-Fernández, R. (2009). Representing curriculum. *Curriculum Inquiry, 39*(1), 235–253.

Acknowledgments

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first met Bill and his partner Jeff many years ago in New Orleans over a dinner meeting held during an AERA annual conference. The only graduate student at the dinner and expecting to observe (and not speak), I was taken back at his interest in my research and the sincerity with which he engaged me in intellectual conversation. Over the years we kept in touch and his work on Ida B. Wells inspired my research into the biography of Mahatma Gandhi, the motivation for a research trip to India. For this collection, I want to acknowledge the ways in which he offered his support and guidance from 2004 to the present, from crafting and promoting the conference to feedback on the design and layout of this edited text. During that time, Pinar's enthusiasm for this project seemed boundless; he gladly took my late night phone calls when a crisis arose and sent kind supportive e-mails that always seemed to arrive just when I needed them. Most important, he offered his ideas and advice without apology but remained supportive and unfazed when I decided to go a different way. For example, he has never seemed as interested in the postdiscourses as I have been and wished that I were more declarative in the introduction and my portion of the epilogue for this book. Despite our differing perspectives, Pinar continues to be an influential figure for me both professionally and personally, and I know my scholarship is better because of it. It only seems appropriate that this edited collection on post-reconceptualization be dedicated to him.

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