


Editorial



In this fourth issue of LEARNing Landscapes we step into the contested area of curriculum. Our aim is to move away from the instrumentalist and accountability notions that tend to drive curriculum, into spaces that connect teachers and students actively, empathically, ethically, and democratically. It is in these spaces between the “curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-live(d)” that become the sites of “living pedagogy” where student interests and academic knowledge are connected, critical thinking and reflection are developed, and pressing social issues are addressed (Aoki, 2003, as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 426). Throughout the issue the authors talk passionately and creatively about the “lived curriculum,” “the pedagogy of imagination,” the “child-to-child” curriculum, the “curriculum of desire,” “narrative curriculum making,” the “relevant curriculum,” the “real curriculum,” and “inquiry as curriculum.” They present nuanced and innovative lenses for thinking about the multifaceted dimensions of curriculum, the tremendous responsibility entailed in this work, and the potential and exciting possibilities that exist.

Our eminent commentators, Nel Noddings, Madeleine Grumet, and Michelle Fine, all of whom have made substantial contributions to education over many years, and to whom we owe a great deal of thanks, provide critical and inspiring “food for thought” about current curriculum issues. Noddings suggests that educators turn their focus from accountability to responsibility. She argues that accountability, narrowly defined as it is, has a deleterious effect on education, creating an atmosphere of compliance, competition, and even dishonesty in an effort to avoid criticism and negative outcomes. Responsibility, on the other hand, requires educators to meet all the needs of students placed in their care. She posits responsibility as a broad and all-encompassing goal that seeks to create physical, psychological, and emotional safety, to develop intellectual curiosity and honesty, to foster ethical and moral behaviour, and to teach imaginatively and holistically while maintaining integrity to

the particular curricular “area.” It is, she maintains, incumbent upon educators teaching from the vantage point of responsibility to continue their own learning. Grumet reminds us profoundly that curriculum “is made up.” Using the example of when scientists disqualified Pluto as a planet because of its size, she shows how definitions, beliefs and assumptions, and particular voices of power, in this case in astronomy, make the decisions about planets, and similarly in education, about curriculum. She suggests that teachers do not “need to be more creative or innovative than they are.” Rather they need to be able to claim public and political spaces in which to share their work, gain clout and participate in the politics of curriculum innovation. Fine decries a discussion about curriculum, before closely examining much more broadly the intent of public schooling, or what students need to know to both “flourish in and challenge” the current world laced with inequities and uncertainty. She calls for intentionality and participation as the key elements of “lived curriculum,” describing, among other examples, how the program, College Bound, developed collaboratively with women serving prison sentences and a group of advocates from the outside realized a “curriculum” of hope, passion, and liberation. She contrasts this with what takes place in public schools where race and class inequities are repeatedly reproduced rather than interrupted. She is adamant that it is only when curriculum intersects with participation, intentionality and democracy, within a context of rigor, relevance, and engagement that it can be re-visioned. These compelling commentaries poignantly set the stage for the articles that follow.

The articles by Armstrong, Mwebi, McCarney, Quenneville, and Leggo adroitly map out from different perspectives some conditions for curriculum innovation. Armstrong, a professor at Middlebury College in Vermont, elaborates strongly and convincingly for the need for a “pedagogy of the imagination.” Building on the work of Calvino and Dewey, Armstrong argues that imagination helps children find out what they know, provides the context for developing a skill, and guides the direction that teachers take in response to each child. The reciprocal kind of pedagogy that supports imagination requires close observation and interpretation, a “living within the work,” a commentary that expands the understanding of both the student and teacher, and a “critical response” that increases self-consciousness, but does not shut down subsequent initiative. It also includes formative assessment that both recognizes achievement and advances understanding. Mwebi, currently an assistant professor at St. Francis Xavier University in Nova Scotia, began his teaching career in Kenya. In his study, he advocates what is called “a child-to-child curriculum approach” where students came to grips with the devastating effect of HIV/AIDS on their rural community in Kenya. He shows how, through narrative inquiry and representing the students’ voices in found poetry, the students became empowered and able to confront

squarely the HIV/AIDS problem in their community and resist behaviour that might put them at risk. Also, they learned to challenge cultural taboos and became educational advocates inside and outside of school. Their collaborative work provided a democratic space for their voices and developed hope for their future. McCarney, a middle-school teacher at Selwyn House in Montreal, describes how he became committed to the idea of democratic classrooms, and moved with his all-male class of grade seven students into collaboratively constructing a democratically run classroom. He shares in text, pictures, and a reflective interview the lessons learned by his students and by him, and the engagement that was shared during this project. Quenneville, a grade eleven student at St. George's High School in Montreal, describes how his experience in high school has been engaging and very worthwhile because of the basic tenets of the school. These are that health must come first; learning comes from doing; the classroom should be freed from unnatural constraints; education should be adapted to the needs and differences of each child; group-consciousness and social-mindedness should be developed; and each child should have abundant opportunity for creative expression. He attributes the balance and successes that he has experienced in both intellectual and physical endeavours to these fundamentals that guide the curriculum. Last, but certainly not least, Carl Leggo, a professor of education at the University of British Columbia, transports us through the power of his poetry into contemplating life's learning or "the curriculum of desire."

Shaun Murphy, Simmee Chung, and Debbie Pushor, all narrative inquiry scholars, demonstrate the importance of relationship and narrative in curriculum making. Murphy, an assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan, examines the narratives of a teacher and two students to show poignantly how "nested knowing" shaped the understanding and the ever-evolving process of curriculum making in a multi-age elementary classroom. Chung, a graduate student in education at the University of Alberta, inquires narratively and autobiographically into her experiences and "early landscapes" as a child as she emigrated from England to Canada and then moved to several different places. Frequently, as part of a visible minority, she felt marginalized because deficit notions of language and education prevailed. Her journey attuned her as a teacher to the need, above all, for focusing on "a curriculum of lives." Pushor, also an assistant professor at the University of Saskatchewan, explores how so often parents are a neglected part of the curriculum puzzle. She describes how through narrative inquiry and reflection, a teacher, Kelly, was able to re-imagine/re-story constructively and empathetically what had previously been a difficult relationship with a parent. She posits that this kind of relational understanding that Kelly developed has implications for both the school and teacher education curriculum.

Marguerite Comley, Cathrine Le Maistre and Diane Sprackett, Chris Milligan and Wes Cross, and Stewart Adam all direct their attention to curriculum from the lenses of different subject areas. Comley, the Department Head of Science at Lower Canada College in Montreal, discusses the importance of using inquiry-based laboratory experiments as part of the science program because it permits students to build on prior knowledge, attain a high level of conceptual understanding, and integrate the science curriculum with societal issues. It gives students voice and self-awareness in the classroom. She cautions that the benefits of exploration in inquiry learning can be lost if too great an emphasis is placed on course content. Le Maistre, an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at McGill University, and Sprackett, a teacher with the Lester B. Pearson School Board in Quebec, emphasize the importance of listening carefully to children in problem-solving mathematics. They describe a study with student examples where the teacher of a grade 2/3 mathematics class used a glove puppet called Sylvester to listen attentively to their understandings of problems, and their creative and differing solutions in what was a non-threatening environment. The students became sophisticated, varied, and collaborative in their problem-solving interactions and activities. Milligan, an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at McGill University and Cross, an administrator at McGill University, describe the evolution of a school-based project about Remembrance and World War Two. They show with interesting examples and links to Web sites how students used digital technology to record and analyze archival material and high school year books. They did this in conjunction with an oral history and community study to develop a contextualized understanding of the tolls of war, and a critical stance towards source materials. Adam, a student at Dawson College in Montreal, highlights his passion for computers and technology. He describes how he became enchanted with programming and then subsequently constrained by copyright. As a result, he has become an advocate for open-source software and he suggests how this may be used in “real-life” problem solving and translated into classroom pedagogy.

Teri Todd and Jacquie Medina, Susan Kerwin-Boudreau, Morgan Douglas, and Dorothy Lichtblau all turn their attention to curriculum issues and innovations in higher education. Todd and Medina, both assistant professors at California State University, Chico, in the departments of Kinesiology and Outdoor Education respectively, wrestle with teaching the curriculum set forth for courses at their university, while honouring the meaning that students derive from their own learning, or what they call the “real curriculum.” Todd ponders, particularly if outcome measures are pre-determined, “If a teacher values the development of knowledge from experience and believes that is the true learning, does this become the priority?” Medina advocates

with an example, for transforming the “hidden curriculum” or “real curriculum,” into the “understood curriculum.” They close with a discussion about the tension that arises when evaluating student learning as advocates of the real curriculum who are faced with institutional assessment requirements. Kerwin-Boudreau is a teacher at Champlain College in St. Lambert, Quebec. Her study explores, through interviews and concept mapping, the evolution of perspectives in six college-level teachers while engaged in the Master Teachers Program, a professional development program aimed at promoting the scholarship of teaching at the college level. She is able to show using interesting metaphors the process of how their thinking shifted from their perspective of teacher as a master of a discipline, to viewing themselves as master teachers or pedagogical leaders in their specific disciplines with increased attention dedicated to learner-oriented classrooms and courses. Douglas, a consultant for the Kativik School Board, advocates for what she calls a relevant curriculum. After extensive teaching and living in the Inuit community, she describes her initial naivety and then her subsequent understanding of the historical and detrimental impact on education in the north brought about by the colonizing intrusion of southerners. She discusses how, more recently, changes have been made to align the curriculum with the belief system and needs of the Inuit students. She suggests strongly, and with examples, that teacher education and professional development programs for southern teachers still need to develop more nuanced ways for acquiring cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance for teaching in the north. Lichtblau, a teacher, drama consultant, and currently the Horowitz Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, discusses how performative inquiry is an embodied and dialectical way for exploring curriculum that contributes to teaching and learning. She describes how she used the story of Anne Frank in a context of performative inquiry. The students were able to reflect on the convergence of the reader’s experience with the embodied experience of enactment. In this way, the inquiry becomes the curriculum and as a result, learning deeply, contextually, and collaboratively occurs through drama.

In closing, the important notions and nuances of curriculum discussed in this issue of LEARning Landscapes may best be summarized in the following call to educators to re-vision curriculum articulated by the eminent Canadian curriculum theorist, Ted Aoki.

... the word *curriculum* is yearning for new meanings. It feels choked, out of breath, caught in a landscape wherein “curriculum” as master signifier is restricted to planned curriculum with all its supposed, splendid instrumentalism. I call on fine arts

educators in particular, with their strong sense of poetics, to offer inspiration and leadership in the promising work of creating a new landscape wherein “live(d) curricula” can become a legitimated signifier. We seek your guiding hand in reshaping and reconstituting the landscape such that in generative third spaces earth’s rhythms can be heard, at times in thunderous rolls and at other times in fingertip whispers, not only in fine arts classes but also throughout the school wherever teachers and students gather in the name of inspirited education. (Aoki, 1996, as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2005, p. 423)

L.B.K.

References

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Lynn Butler-Kisber (B. Ed., M. Ed., McGill University; Ed.D., Harvard University), a former elementary school teacher, is a Professor in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education in the Faculty of Education at McGill where she is Director of the Centre for Educational Leadership and the McGill Graduate Certificate in Educational Leadership Programs. She has served as Director of Undergraduate Education Programs, Director of Graduate Studies and Research in Educational Studies, Associate Dean in Education, and Associate Dean and Dean of Students, and on numerous committees inside the University and in the educational milieu. Just recently she was appointed to the Board of Directors of St. George's Schools. Winner of the 1997 YWCA Women of Distinction award (Education) and 2008 Canada Post award (Educator), she teaches courses on language arts, qualitative research, and teacher education. She has a particular interest in feminist/equity and social justice issues, and the role of arts-informed analysis and representation in qualitative inquiry. Her current research and development activities include the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) Efficacy Study, as well as projects with Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, England and Indonesia, and teachers and school leaders in Quebec. The focus of this work is on literacy learning, student engagement, leadership, professional development, and qualitative methodologies and she has published and presented extensively in these areas.

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