

# *Foundering on the Shores of Curriculum: The Risks and Rewards of Interdisciplinarity*

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This issue of the journal offers a set of broadly interdisciplinary approaches to thinking about curriculum and educational experience. While the nature of the journal often elicits this range of work, the interdisciplinarity of this issue is particularly striking, moving as it does between history education and psychoanalysis, practices of ecology and art-making, and discourses on sport and the body. Taken as a whole, this issue asks us as curriculum scholars to consider both the significance of each of these methods and frameworks for thinking about curriculum and also the importance of our commitment to interdisciplinarity as a defining feature of curriculum theorizing. Indeed, our orientation toward curriculum not primarily as a set of object or texts but as the course of study or movement between them, might be described as an inherently interdisciplinary method.

As Barthes “argued many years ago, truly interdisciplinary work changes the object, it changes the point of departure so that instead of

'founding' the object, we follow it: it 'is experienced only in an activity of production...it cannot stop...its constitutive movement is that of a cutting across" (Probyn, 1995, p. 7). Here, the method of interdisciplinary work follows the mutable and multiple existence of the object or subject and, in doing so, does not normalize any one discourse about the subject, but incites or produces many discourses and knowledges in a "sideways" and anti-teleological movement. Similarly, Foucault offers us the method of what he calls a "genealogical project" which "entertain[s] the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filtre, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge" (Foucault, 1980, p. 83). Genealogies thus produce a multiple and contradictory discourse or history reflective of the subjects who make it. As a form of resistance, "a genealogy should be seen as a kind of attempt to emancipate historical knowledges from...subjection, to render them...capable of opposition and of struggle against the coercion of a theoretical, unitary, formal, and scientific discourse" (p. 85).

What both an interdisciplinary and genealogical method, as presented here, have in common is their attempt to deconstruct and resist the establishment of foundations. "This is not to say there is no foundation, but rather, that wherever there is one, there will also be a foundering, a contestation. That such foundations exist only to be put into question is, as it were, the permanent risk of democratization" (Butler, 1992, p. 16). The articles in this issue each demonstrate the adoption of such a method of curriculum theorizing, which resists the establishment of foundations and foregrounds the question, the movement, the course – characterized in this issue, for example, by Nicholas Ng-A-Fook as the dance and by Lisa Farley as the pilgrimage.

And yet, as Farley notes, "particularly in a field organized around understanding, such that education tends to be, it is hard both to attend and speak in terms that pierce the disciplinary boundaries we typically

use to ward off the radical vulnerability that knowledge ushers in.” In response to this difficulty, Farley works through her essay to attend to the beliefs and knowledges, both historical and personal, through which we might risk greater vulnerability but also allow for a space of learning in the context of great loss. Her essay offers a reading of her own and others “reluctant pilgrimage” to Rose of the Carrier’s grave as a compelling example of how “imperial wishfulness and transcultural reparation come together in the ‘need to believe’ at a site of history’s lost objects.” Through her exploration, she considers the ways in which history education might be re-animated through an attention to the need for belief, and in the process enriches our sense of curriculum studies through her own attention to the discourses and methods of psychoanalysis and history.

Not unlike the risk of “radical vulnerability” identified by Farley, Ng-A-Fook enjoins us to risk a turn away from “what Jardine evocatively calls the urban cluttered noise, in which many of us now live” toward an ecological frame of mind. He describes the destabilization of such an interdisciplinary move and writes, “I fear what I may or may not find within the potential emptiness of this kind of asking.” Despite these fears – and the experience of vulnerability they suggest – Ng-A-Fook argues for the importance of “destabilizing our current pedagogical articulations of Western science” in order to develop an ecojustice curriculum. Such a move, he argues, requires an “inter/disciplinary curricular dance... that challenges monocultural understandings... [and] entails moving beyond representations of environmental education rooted both epistemologically and culturally within the disciplinary regimes of science and social science.”

Taking up this challenge, Rena Upitis, Philip Abrami, and Ann Patteson’s study aims to rethink and enrich education in the field of ecology by interrupting typical curricular practices through a turn to art-making. They set out to determine “whether art-making in a wilderness

setting, in combination with formal sessions on energy use, might serve as a disorienting catalyst for participants, causing them to think differently about the environment, their art-making, and their teaching." The disorientation of the interdisciplinary move toward art-making as ecological curriculum echoes the risks taken in the other articles in this issue – what might we know when we risk foundering rather than founding the object? Upitis, Abrami, and Patteson suggest that teachers and students might "reach a deeper, metacognitive level of understanding about how their actions affect the earth...through engagement in artistic practices."

In the final essay of this issue, we remain on an interdisciplinary course but turn to consider another framework for thinking about the making of knowledge and curriculum in schools. In "La figure de Terry Fox: Handicap, performance et conséquences pour l'éducation," Cornelia Schneider explores how ideologies of disability are reproduced in schools through our heroification of Terry Fox. In contrast to the interdisciplinary modes of re-presenting that others have already suggested can form the basis for rich educational experience, Schneider addresses school-based discourses that aim to found the subject of "Terry Fox" or fix the meanings associated with his image. She argues that the image of Terry Fox promoted in schools has come to represent the notion of handicap as something that can and should be overcome, and that nation-wide efforts to associate Terry Fox's *Marathon of Hope* with physical performance and philanthropic acts serve an educative desire to normalize through a neoliberal discourse that seeks to create individual citizen-consumers capable of taking control of their own bodies.

Schneider's essay reminds us once again of the limitations such disciplined discourses can pose for students and for schools, but also perhaps of the dangers inherent in valorizing any particular curricular method. As Farley reminds us, even interdisciplinary curriculum "may

wishfully turn away” from the difficulties of knowledge. A truly interdisciplinary method must, as Probyn suggests above, follow the object, rather than found it and, in doing so, remain open to recognizing the difficulties of our encounters with knowledge as well as the limitations inherent to any method we may attach to as we founder on the shores of curriculum.

## References

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