

The Privilege and Place of Canadian Curriculum Studies

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1.

I sit in a glass solarium on the top floor of my eco hotel in the south of Brazil writing on curriculum and teacher learning. The rain pours down outside, vigorously, all day. Yet the grit and graffiti on the buildings still remain. It is a worker's city, large, and without much charm. Old world, colonial architecture settled by the Portuguese overrun by post-war minimalism; the majority of buildings flaunting the aesthetic possibilities of poured concrete. Development then halted. The burgeoning modernist movement cut short by a political coup and new military dictatorship. The scene is reminiscent of a 1965 postcard, with now faded colours and torn edges.

In the distance, cradled by two mountains I can see the beginnings of a Favela – shanty-stacked housing for the impoverished. Initially cultivated by ex-soldiers and later by rural exodus, the Favelas of Brazil are now home to over 11.4 million people. Infant mortality and disease rates are inordinately high in these suburban slums. A history with drug trafficking and crime contribute death rates unparalleled in Brazil. What many of us would consider basic human needs and social rights are not remotely in sight for Favela citizens. The demarcated area, at the edge of the city, has seen increased attention of late, especially in light of the 2014 FIFA World Cup games and the upcoming Olympics. Pacifying police have contravened drug lord governments, schooling programs have emerged, and basic services have been provided in some areas. However, the sharp contrast in socio-economies is still dramatically evident in this Brazilian city.

At the airport opportunists offer tours of the Favela. Part of a new movement in global tourism, *slum tourism* is intended to show travellers the social and economic extremes of a city. For \$150 real, a Brazilian tour guide will take you down Favela main streets, to the local school, and to popular public areas. The government supports this tourism, directing some monies toward supports and resources for the Favelas. Slum tourism sits on an ethical line between increasing awareness of poverty and exhibiting the poor for profit. Regardless of ethics, the presence of slum tourism highlights the polarity of opportunity evident here, the extreme privilege and extreme poor.

As the rain runs down the windows, it distorts my view of the city. From where I am positioned, I see, and write, from an endlessly privileged perspective.

2.

I am perpetually lost amongst books. Here, in the corner of the library, I have to shuffle volumes around to make room for me to type. The shelf allotted to me for reserve texts has overflowed, and the books that I have collected over the last week are occupying a third of the shelf above the one marked by my name.

Outside, sleet falls. The sub-zero temperatures and the precipitation have made the sidewalks perilous. I saw two cars crash and one young girl spill her groceries following a fall on the walk to work this morning. Inside, where I sit now, I see only trees and gardens from the corner window by my desk, and the precipitation fades into oblivion unless I take the time to look for it in the foreground of evergreens and red brick.

I am at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, which is nestled quietly in Georgetown, Washington DC. Besides vast gardens, a stunning museum, and amongst the most precious of libraries, this workspace hosts research fellows and students, supporting scholarship in three areas: Byzantine Studies, Pre-Columbian Studies, and Garden and

Landscape Studies. This place owes its existence to Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss, patrons of the humanities, who established Dumbarton Oaks as a space where scholars could withdraw to reflect, compose, collaborate, and create. I am surrounded by beauty. I feel there is no better simulacrum for curriculum studies than this interdisciplinary, collaborative, challenging, and magical space where I sit, surrounded by books, overlooking gardens and trees.

A million marched in Paris yesterday. A million protested another instance of senseless terrorism. This time, it is freedom of the press that was imperiled. Perhaps it is always intellectual freedom that is threatened by terror and by violence. I saw the White House had sentinels walking on its roof yesterday. Is this what the Baron Lord Henry Courtney foreshadowed when he advised us that the price of peace is eternal vigilance?

I am withdrawn to a corner of a library in a corner of the world and, as a consequence of my privilege and my safe haven, I can think freely and write liberally.

3.

Curriculum scholars, to whatever extent possible, each look to make sense of the places they inhabit and of the values and social rights we defend. Our curriculum studies are largely contextual. From our

Canadian landscape – howsoever diverse this landscape may be – the questions that we pose, the means that we use to engage with our inquiries, and the potential solutions that we envisage are often comfortably bound by the parameters of our national discourses and privilege. Common questions seem estranged, or dislocated, when we step outside of the comforts of familiar space and time into some other place. We have the privilege of purposefully dislocating ourselves, to seek out worldliness, and to inquire into curricular questions, from perspectives temporarily framed by a foreign experience. Our curriculum studies are one of privilege and place. We must tread carefully amidst the rain, the sun, the snow, here and abroad.