CHAPTER 8

Curriculum Theorists in the Classroom: Subjectivity, Crises, and Socio-environmental Equity

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Through our ongoing work in the field of curriculum studies and with future teachers in the complex world of the classroom, we attempt to draw attention and make space for the inner life and its significance to education. Largely neglected, the inner life and its impact on the social have been well documented by scholars who have written about the ways the unconscious has been marginalized in education (Britzman 1998; Taubman 2012). While the significance of psychic processes emerged with the re-conceptualization of curriculum in the 1970s, this shift was not experienced by the field of teacher education directly. As Pinar explains, "the function of the new scholarship was not to change curriculum practice; it was to understand curriculum as political" (Pinar 2010, p. 736). From the vantage point of this space of tension, shaped

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by the affordances of curriculum studies and the competing demands of work with future teachers, we contribute to this volume by taking up socio-environmental equity, an issue of curriculum and pedagogy that has garnered international attention. In keeping with the editors' provocation to "re/direct the familiar into new, toward more hopeful and fresh educational and societal directions" (Hébert et al. 2018, p. 2), we take up the notion of "promises without promise," particularly in light of the question: What is the role of education, globally, in the face of environmental crises and related injustices? We consider this question, by looking at the curricular and pedagogical implications of a project we undertook in our respective teacher education classrooms. Following Taubman (2012), we offer no promise of answers and solutions. Instead we look for the possibility of radical hope (Lear 2006) in the face of widespread vulnerability resulting from escalating global crises.

Following Huebner (1975), who writes of the benefits of attempting to disentangle the activities of the curricularist, we seek, with this chapter, to bring to light the "evolving dialectical relationships among (our) practice, empirical research, and language" (p. 252). While disentangling is not really possible, Huebner notes that efforts at such work are illuminating, given what can be learned about the self, and the conditions in which we attempt to work. Central to our work of untying is the notion of subjectivity, which we define as an individual's sense of self, which is shaped in relation to/with/by others and experiences, as they intersect with issues of power, knowledge, and authority (Britzman 2003; Pinar 2009; Taubman 2012). Indeed, Huebner writes, "practice as human event implies that the curricularist is also a human being with a biography in conflict and harmony with the other emerging biographies being played out in historically evolving institutions" (Huebner 1975, p. 266). Interested in how subjectivity plays out in becoming a teacher and the significance of psychodynamics in relation to education, we draw on a psychoanalytic framework (Britzman 2003; Britzman and Pitt 1996; Brown et al. 2006). In this chapter, we also turn to the work of Mnguni (2010, 2012) as she explores what psychodynamic insights can offer to wider sociocultural phenomena, including institutional efforts for environmental sustainability. These lenses are central to our work as teacher educators and essential in reconsidering the role of the curriculum theorists at this time. Teaching with Lear's (2006) notion of radical hope, we live and work where curriculum intersects with the specter of

"megaproblems," such as effects of climate change, poverty, inequality, conflict, and pandemics (Warwick 2012, pp. 132–133).

In what follows, we illustrate the significance of the above lenses by drawing on the story of what unfolded in a capstone course with teacher candidates in the final year of a concurrent education program. We begin with a description of the educative environment we sought to create; we then present an analysis of the findings of our inquiry into the future teachers' perceptions of their professional role in connection with teaching for socio-environmental equity. "We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment" (Huebner 1975, p. 260). Thus, we close with a consideration of our own entanglements and their implications for teacher education and curriculum theorizing, at this point in time.

In our forays into the work of socio-environmental equity, we began by asking students to consider the question, "How do we come to know and think as teachers?" (Robertson 1997, p. 27). We attempted to work against notions of fixed identities and knowledge and rigid imaginations of transformation and outcome-focused models of education by using an inquiry-based approach. In our consideration of socio-environmental equity and sustainability in the capstone course, we took up a holistic understanding of the concepts (Jones et al. 2010; Tillbury 2011; Toh and Cawagas 2010), taking into account "cultural, environmental, health, peace, social justice, scientific and technological dimensions" (Jones et al. 2010, p. 11). Such a perspective does not connect socio-environmental issues uniquely to the teaching of science, geography, or environmental education, as might be the case elsewhere (Esa 2010; Ravindranath 2007; Summers et al. 2005; Sund and Wickman 2008; Yang et al. 2010). Instead, a holistic perspective proposes that economic, environmental, and equity-focused issues are interdependent (Salite and Pipere 2006). From this point of view, we saw a role for all future and practicing teachers in considering socio-environmental sustainability, regardless of the boundaries of their disciplinary backgrounds.

We had, prior to this experience, framed our work through the lens of moral cosmopolitanism, and the possibilities of promoting human rights and dignity through collaborative action (Schattle 2008). However, we turned to the imperative of environmental stewardship as a means to bring future teachers to fuller recognition of the significance of their daily choices and investments. We problematized the use of the terms *sustainability* and *sustainable development* given the ways that

they can be used without challenging "existing education paradigms" (Jackson 2011; Martusewicz et al. 2011, p. 13). As Hart (2010) writes, "when normative goals of sustainability are left undefined, dominant economics-based rather than social-environmental discourses shape wider socio-political agendas" (pp. 163–164). Within the interdisciplinary capstone course, the integration of the social, natural, political, and economic dimensions served as a means for future teachers to pose problems and design inquiries that they saw as significant to themselves and relevant to their future students (Freire 1990; Salite and Pipere 2006). Interdisciplinarity disrupts the compartmentalization of learning that is prevalent in schools; it also allows for meaning making that might otherwise not have been possible (Ackerson 2007; Boix-Mansilla 2006; Lattuca 2003; Orr 2004; Richards 2007).[1]

The capstone course had three axes with five interrelated assignments, some of which were carried out during an embedded 13-week practicum. Coursework included the individual design and implementation of a socio-environmental service project in the community (public school, university, or wider community). The projects often emerged from the students' analysis of key concepts related to eco-justice, sustainability, education for sustainable development, and environmental, and social equity. Students also carried out collaborative research and the design of informal "educational installations," which we called the "Seats of Knowledge," as the installation had to incorporate a chair, literally, in some way. The unique, eye-catching projects were set up on campus or in local schools to promote increased awareness of socio-environmental practices. This assignment, in particular, was carried out prior to collaborative design of an interdisciplinary unit of study using the theme selected for the installation. Finally, the teacher candidates in the course engaged in a critical examination of subjectivity and the teacher self by working with difficult moments in their teaching practice and producing a related digital film (Aitken and Radford 2012; Radford and Aitken 2014, 2015).

[1]The future teachers use the mandated Quebec Education Program to collaboratively design interdisciplinary units around socio-environmental issues and practices that they would attempt to use in practicum placements. The program is flexibly structured and has multiple entry points; two of the program's five main curricular lenses for planning, support sustainability focused teaching, and allow the future teachers to imagine themselves contributing to global change.

By having students work through problems collaboratively and make use of their disciplinary expertise in interdisciplinary ways, we tried to open the space of tension and ambiguity for the teacher candidates, while hoping they would attach themselves to sustainability pedagogies (Cotton and Winter 2010). With these assignments, we had the dual aim of inviting our students to explore the question, "What kind of teacher do you want to be?" and to imagine educative environments (Huebner 1975) that would reflect the type of teacher they imagined they wanted to be. Thus, we asked students to think about their own thinking (Britzman 1998; Britzman and Pitt 1996), their practice, and the language that informed their choices (Huebner 1975).

Disentangling the Language of Practice

What can we learn about the psychological processes underlying responses to the call to take up socio-environmental equity in teacher practice? We turn to the findings of our inquiry into the teacher candidates' perceptions of their professional role in connection with teaching for socio-environmental equity. With and against these findings, we consider the value of attending to psychic dynamics in the classroom, particularly at a time when anxieties around a world in crisis are heightened.

One of the key features to emerge from our inquiry was the overwhelming concern that the pre-service teachers expressed about barriers to such work. This went hand in hand with the common perception that engaging in—or promoting—socio-environmental equity in their teaching would be disruptive in the workplace. This was even the case for those whose lives were explicitly shaped by heightened attention to environmental and justice-focused practices. Despite identifying possible stances, such as helping students build knowledge and critical decision making, the future teachers were very specific in naming features of a school context that would impede them from actively promoting environmental and economic justice in their future work. Particular details include the notion that, "a school might simply have other (more important) priorities," "it might be something that's not done now," and without the interest of other colleagues or their understanding of socio-environmental issues, action would not be possible. This perception of an inability to take action within a school community was further illustrated by these comments: "A new teacher, they would not be the *voice* of reason to go to," (our italics) particularly in the face of "strong

[sic] held opinions by others." Additionally, it was noted that it would be, "difficult for a new teacher to teach for [environmental and social equity] if the other teachers in the school and the school administration are not devoted to [it] and think it is a *waste of time*" (our italics).

Other barriers were connected to feeling responsible for the youth they were teaching. As one teacher candidate indicated, "I want to make sure my students are learning all the content they need to know for the next level." We linked this with the perception that teachers don't have the "freedom" to address issues that seem outside of the prescribed curriculum. On the other hand, some identified the potential problem of the lack of resources and knowledge. This idea of needing plenty of resources matched the idea that such work requires "more" time—which they claimed was unavailable.

While it appears unlikely that the future teachers would take a leadership role in promoting socio-environmental justice through policy, practice, and pedagogy in their schools, they expressed a willingness to contribute, under certain conditions. As one described, they would participate if "the whole staff in the school is devoted" and they "have plenty of resources on the subject." Or as another put it, "If the principal and the other teachers are on board, it won't be a big hassle." Significantly, the inquiry showed that there was an image of school culture as monolithic and possibly impenetrable; this is significant, given that the future teachers also appeared to believe that such work requires participation from the "whole staff", and conceptual knowledge, time, and materials to which they would not have access.

While perceived obstacles such at the need for time, knowledge, and resources have been identified in other studies of pre-service teachers' social-environmental learning (Hasslof et al. 2016), we are particularly interested in thinking about three points that reflect the pre-service teachers' anxiety. These include:

- the perception that the "whole school" must be "devoted" and "onboard" in the work;
- the failure to recognize existing initiatives in schools;
- the idea that taking a position for environmental equity or sustainable living through teaching will be inordinately disruptive and will lead to negative repercussions for them.

These points are significant and merit further attention because they do not correspond to what we observed nor what was represented by the teacher candidates in relation to their experiences prior to the practicum. That is, their heightened anxiety and characterization of the schools as hostile to teaching with a socio-environmental focus was somewhat incommensurable with their prior school and community-based experiences. These included the interest generated by their installations, the appreciation of community service projects, and their facility with planning sustainability-focused learning situations that made effective use of prescribed program documents.

Untangling Paradoxical Relationships Between Practice and Research

In describing the educative environment of the course, we indicated that we began by inviting our students to enter into a dialogue around a world in crisis, the urgency of equitable and sustainable practices, and self-knowledge in teaching and learning. We considered the arguments of those writing about such engagements; for example, Cook et al. (2010) and Jackson (2011) write that individuals need to be equipped to challenge and question their own values, and as McKenzie (2009) suggests, experience "crisis, discomfort [and] difficulty" (p. 218). Correspondingly, we framed the course as part of an vital call for future teachers to not only address what Warwick (2012) calls "megaproblems" with their teaching, but to prepare their own students to "critically and creatively read their world" (p. 143).

In disentangling what became evident, we found that we underestimated the degree to which the candidates found their own beliefs were challenged through the learning experiences; however, this did not appear to be evident at the time as students appeared highly engaged. In thinking about the pedagogical dynamic, we now turn to Mnguni (2010), who writes about anxiety in sustainability. She suggests that such engagements can be understood as a defense against the "complexity and enormity of the task" of saving a world in crisis when wide-scale, massive "long-term behavior changes" in society are required (pp. 132–133). Further illustrating this point, once we had engaged the students in thinking about a world in crisis, our focus turned to what Mnguni refers to as the "creative and restorative intent of sustainability" (p. 118),

which in the case of the capstone course offered up a relatively simple and straightforward solution for students: build knowledge and take creative action through designs for learning.

Reading Our Own Entanglements

We have come to understand that in shaping the educative environment, we had not taken into account the significance of our own participation in the frenzy for solutions to the world's "megaproblems." Britzman (1998) writes of the inevitable desire to control the outcomes or manage chaos, in the face of crises. This pull is toward what Britzman terms "curative" practices and what Taubman (2012) calls the "therapeutic project." As Britzman (1998) notes, a "quest for rationality" and scientific certainty is not surprising when problems are faced (p. 32). However, she underlines the importance of disrupting curative approaches, as does Taubman (2012) in this description of an alternate:

> The emancipatory project [in contrast to the therapeutic], works toward deepening and helping us understand and articulate our inner lives without promising the result will be happier, more beautiful, a more just life or better job or a better relationship or a higher test score. The emancipatory project eschews efforts at control and cure, offering questions and an interminable analysis, rather than answers and solutions. (pp. 6–7)

Aided by Taubman's conceptualization of therapeutic and emancipatory stances, we propose that the intensity of our investments was part of our own therapeutic impulse to cure. We provoked students to achieve the idealized ends we had in mind, and consequently they were mirrored by the future teachers' excitement about creating installations, implementing informal learning situations, carrying out community service projects, and developing creative and dynamic plans for student learning. Through this "therapeutic approach" we were defending against "the nature of the anxiety that attends the primary task of trying to restore socio-ecological landscapes" (Mnguni 2010, p. 118).

The future teachers' anxiety was also evident in their comments that a socio-environmental focus in teaching would disrupt or "hassle" others in the school settings. We now propose that this was a projection of the discomfort they experienced while considering the notion of a world in crisis, and in recognizing their isolation and vulnerability (Britzman 2003).

Mnguni (2010) writes, "the problem of sustainability … involves an intricate web of connectedness among psycho-social and ecological issues. This complexity places sustainability in the inter-organizational domain, making collaboration by multiple stakeholders imperative" (p. 117). In relation to this point, we turn to our other research around teacher candidates' critical moments in teaching, which we have been studying during the last five years. These crises are most likely to erupt around interpersonal relationships within the school setting. The research has revealed the magnitude of the struggles the pre-service teachers face in taking on the identity of teacher, and simply imagining a place for themselves in a school—without also having to imagine changing school culture as well (Aitken and Radford 2012; Radford and Aitken 2014). This furthers our understanding of future teachers' preoccupations with relationships. It also helps us understand why it appears that the pre-service teachers seem unable to imagine themselves as leaders within a school setting around the question of environmental and social equity. This is particularly the case if they imagine such work as being confrontational and involving challenges to others about their beliefs—as they themselves had been challenged through the course design.

Notably, the capstone course is connected to a lengthy placement, preparation for which is marked by the students' heightened desire to be "fully prepared." Significantly, the "creative and restorative" (Mnguni 2010) work on socio-environmental equity and collaborative learning in the teacher education classroom (through the problem-posing designs, installation creation, and inquiry projects) appeared to assuage this need. Yet, it is problematically "curative," as Britzman would say. That is, it appears that such work provides a sense of "control and mastery", until, that is, the future teachers enter the school context (Britzman 1998, p. 32). In leaving behind relationships with collaborative peers from within their well-known cohort in the teacher education classroom, "idiosyncratic subjectivities" (others and their own) bring them into new "relationship[s] fraught with unconscious desires and shadows from the past" (Taubman 2012, p. 7). The future teachers' expressions of anxiety and resistance, and their anticipation that they will be seen as disruptive, confrontational, or "hassling" others, are accompanied by their immobilization. Some candidates attempt to explain this powerlessness and voicelessness as a function of being in an early career position. We propose that this is a function of subjectivities at work and being in the

grip of overwhelming emotions, compounded by the notion of a world in crisis. This underlines the importance of decentering efforts to build socio-environmental knowledge and capacity, and instead prioritizing the emancipatory project (Taubman 2012), wherein the future teachers learn to better understand and express their inner lives.

We cannot escape the fact that the pull toward the curative is brought into sharp focus in a world facing an ecological crisis: Informed action is needed and our individual and collective choices have the potential to positively or negatively impact human and ecological degradation. Yet, as our inquiry above illustrates, and as Britzman (1998) writes, "rationality … can [not] settle the trouble that inaugurates thought"—we cannot think our way out of feelings of vulnerability and helplessness, exacerbated by the specter of increasingly complex megaproblems (p. 32). This proposition returns us to Taubman's (2012) broader conceptualizations of the therapeutic and the emancipatory, which seem in opposition, but cannot be neatly separated. We experienced the pull toward a therapeutic response of trying to smooth over and find solutions for situations instead of dwelling in the emancipatory work of questions and analysis. Taubman (2012) makes the point that anxieties are provoked as we attempt to resist fixed protocols while at the same time desiring some sort of direction. He explains that the therapeutic and emancipatory projects "are related, often in undisclosed ways" and "blur in the hurly-burly world of the classroom," as was the case for us (p. 7).

Our inquiry into our work as curriculum theorists in the classroom underlines the need to focus more explicitly and in prolonged ways with future teachers (and our own selves) around the significance of psychic dynamics in learning and teaching, and in learning to teach. To those who might ask how attention to the inner life would equip becoming teachers to work with youth in such a way that they collectively pursue common goals of living ethically and ecologically mindfully, locally, and globally, we turn to Lear (2006) and Finch et al. (2014). The latter propose that educators' experiences of working with their unconscious states of mind more explicitly helps them "to recognise and rationalise these [states], thus supporting confidence" in decision making (p. 139). So while there may be no promise of "answers and solutions" (Taubman 2012), a change in thinking about the self may take place, and radical hope (Lear 2006) may emerge. Drawing on Lear (2006), Smits and Naqvi (2015) write that, "to understand and confront precariousness requires a sense of oneself as a person who is indelibly linked with others

through bonds of caring and responsibility" (p. xiii). These are fitting words for a global manifesto for curriculum theorists bonded to the work of education.

Closing Provocation

In our ongoing work in the field of curriculum studies, we draw inspiration from those who have made powerful cases to advance the notion of education as a psychic crisis, and to counter the disavowal of the unconscious in education (Britzman 1998, 2003, 2006; Taubman 2012). We acknowledge that the significance of a psychoanalytic perspective has been purposefully articulated by its advocates for some time (Britzman and Pitt 1996; Brown et al. 2006; Pinar and Grumet 1976; Pitt 2003; Robertson 2001). With this chapter, illustrated by the untangling of our research and practice, we underline fruitfulness of bringing "the radical push of curriculum theorizing" into teacher education classrooms (Hébert et al. 2018, p. 2). Equally, we make a call to curriculum theorists to renew attention to the significance of psychic dynamics in education, particularly in the teacher education classroom where subjectivities are faced with so many competing demands—not the least of which is the challenge to solve the problems of a world in the midst of a socio-environmental crisis.

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