

Living in View of The Past

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In his book *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), literary critic Harold Bloom offers a framework for poetic interpretation that is based on “Six Revisionary Ratios” (p. 14). The first of these ratios is *Clinamen*, which Bloom defines as “poetic misreading or misprision proper” (p. 14). He writes, “The history of fruitful poetic influence...is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist” (p. 30). I have often thought the history of the curriculum studies field can be read in much the same way. Often embedded in the work we do as curriculum scholars are the seeds of our own anxieties about whether or not the work we do “counts,” about whether or not our work has influence, about whether or not we are in fact a “field,” about whether or not our intellectual commitments are fairly categorized. One might argue that it is, in fact, such anxieties (in terms of how we are influenced and how we are influential) that hold us together and move us ahead as a field. A little dose of intellectual anxiety is, on the whole, probably a healthy thing.

In 2009 I agreed to chair the AAACS Canon Committee, and although I knew I would be serving with three outstanding colleagues—Nina Asher, Erik Malewski, and Janet Miller—I must admit to feeling anxious. Throwing a lasso around the curriculum field’s intellectual history and wrestling it to the ground seemed an impossible task, and certainly one that promised to alienate many and placate few. Nonetheless, after much hard work and rich conversation, the committee submitted to the AAACS membership in 2010, a list of thirty-four texts the committee felt should form the basis of a curriculum canon. We concluded our report by writing:

If nothing else, it is the committee’s hope that the curriculum studies canon will encourage,

through concrete understanding of the field's historicity, curriculum scholars to see their own work in complicated conversations with this history, and to imagine and work toward a curriculum canon of the future that will represent a plurality of diverse voices, experiences, and ideas.

This statement is, I think, nicely aligned with the *JAAACS* editorial mission. Like the AAACS conference itself, *JAAACS* represents a place of refractive renewal, a field of play upon which we articulate our varied intellectual commitments to the field, push its boundaries, keep vital its core, and place our work in international, historical, and disciplinary context. I ask that you take a fresh look at the *JAAACS* editorial statement, a small part of which I highlight here: *JAAACS* “will publish research essays that critique and contextualize (theoretically, historically) new scholarship, interweaving past and present ideas in the field.”

I look forward to contributing to the advancement of the curriculum studies fields as editor of *JAAACS*' new North American Literature section. In calling for submissions, I won't go so far as to encourage “self-serving caricature,” “distortion,” and “perverse, willful revisionism,” but I most certainly encourage writing that prompts spirited, constructive debate, vigorous (mis)readings (in the Bloomian sense), and critical engagement with those intellectual anxieties, influential and otherwise, that motivate our work and advance our field. I anxiously await your submissions.

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