

# More than a Double Bind? The Problematic Pedagogical Stance and the Need for AAACS to Take a Stand

Peter Appelbaum  
*Arcadia University*

Welcome to the *Tenth Annual Meeting* of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies! This is a special year as we celebrate our first ten years of work, and we have much to celebrate: in ten years, we have worked as an affiliate of a larger trans-national network of scholars and activists advancing the field of curriculum studies as an international movement, generating intercultural dialogue and promoting global collaborations as part of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, and establishing the complicated conversations of curriculum theory and educational studies as a vibrant and evolving enterprise. In ten years, we have developed and disseminated clear and useful standards and professional ethics for curriculum studies scholarship and academic programs, established a unique and easily accessible on-line journal with a wide readership, carried out a study and reported on the current state of the field, taken on the challenging provocation of the field's canon for a field that prides itself in its self-reflexive critique of such canonization, and sparked powerful discussions about the future of curriculum studies through a collective and diverse task force on the advancement of the field. As we meet this year and take on our year's theme, "Curriculum and Emancipatory Modes of Relationality & Global Interdependence," we have much to build on, much to take pride in, a great deal to honor and respect and extend.

Before we get down and dirty with this important work, though, please join me in hardly-good-enough thanks and appreciation to our current Executive Committee colleagues, who have been so vital to the association and who have been working all year to make our work possible, Louise Anderson Allen, Michael O'Malley and Hongyu Wang. It has been a pleasure to work with Louise, Michael and Hongyu, challenging to me personally, and humbling, as they bring their wisdom to the organization of AAACS and the crafting of our conference this week. I would also like us all to recognize Petra Munro Hendry and Roland Mitchell, the Louisiana State University Curriculum Theory Project, Dean Laura Lindsey of the College of Education at LSU, and the LSU Curriculum Studies Graduate Student Collaborative - especially June Neumann Graham, Karin de Gravelle, Kristen Edwards, and Reagan Mitchell, for hosting this conference, tonight's reception, and several special events this week: an off-site opportunity to meet with Abram Himmelstein and the Neighborhood Story Project, a special coffee tomorrow morning at The Old Coffee Pot, and an excursion to Preservation Hall tomorrow night. Thanks also to Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius for agreeing to honor us with a special theme-related presentation and follow-up workshop, and to the members of the Graduate Student Committee, Seungho Moon, Christopher Strople, and Kelton Williams, for organizing the special session with Anna Wilson, and to Anna for agreeing to talk with graduate students and others about research passions and how to connect these passions with writings and publications.

The thanks continue! Annie Winfield and Petra Munro Hendry have organized an exciting continuation of our discussion of the state of the field, the role of the canon project, and extending the work of the task force on the advancement of the field, which will take place in our Town Hall on Thursday, and Annie and the Publications Committee invite you to meet for lunch afterwards to talk about ways that we can all contribute to the advancement of our work and making our own individual work more visible within AAACS and to the broader community. Alvaro Hypolito and Elizabeth Macedo, from Brazil, have generously agreed this year to participate in our tradition of devoting one specific, special session to the internationalization of curriculum studies, also on Thursday. Beth will also be sharing some information about the upcoming IAACS conference in Brazil during our business meeting on Thursday afternoon. Jennifer Job and the newly formed Committee for Curriculum Theory in Policy is hosting one of our Lagniappe sessions tomorrow afternoon – this is not an official imitative of AAACS, but surely fits our mission in the advancement of the field, and you are encouraged to join them and their efforts. Please speak with Jennifer if you have any questions. Also, these Lagniappe sessions, the clever New Orleans twist on our perhaps too stodgy conference format, offer each of us the chance to sign up for a room and spend time organizing proposals for the membership to consider, or new research or action collaborations while you are here, so please take advantage of this time built into our afternoons – sign up and see what we can do when we meet without a presentation! Speaking of new program features, please join me in thanking Julie Burke and Anna Oerther of Guilford College for the thankless task of putting together this year's program! And finally, I would like us all to thank Hongyu Wang for organizing and chairing our final special session on the program, and Janet Miller, Jim Jupp, and Beth Macedo for agreeing to participate in this panel, on "The Autobiographical, the National, and the Cosmopolitan: Curriculum of Global Interdependence in Transit."

Which brings us full circle to this year's theme and our conference work this year. "Curriculum and Emancipatory Modes of Relationality & Global Interdependence." Our theme asks how our individual and group efforts interconnect with those of others locally and globally to question and/

or to perpetuate assumptions about the possibilities and limits of educational theory and practice. As we scurry from session to session and in our spontaneous conversations in and out of these sessions, I am hoping you will make a point of probing how your own personal passions and commitments interact with ongoing developments trans-nationally and, more specifically, how these interactions recognize and support the ongoing sophistication of our collective, curriculum studies discourse. Recent thematic sessions at our 2009 and 2010 meetings pushed us to consider similar questions through an imperative to address the “cultural and environmental commons.” We raised a number of issues about how we work as a field of curriculum studies and how that field interacts with the “less tangible commons” constituted in part by public education, nonprofit institutions, creative works and public knowledge that are paid for by public funds. At our 2010 business meeting, we charged ourselves as an association to act on this cumulative scholarship. So it is time to take stock: What have we done, each of us, to make our own work in and out of curriculum studies part of the larger project of the cultural and environmental commons?

From our program: “This year we also consider the meta-conversation that questions the efficacy of the pedagogical stance: simply informing people of the issues and their implications does not necessarily lead to change, whether in the realm of social justice, ecological sustainability, common school practices, or transnational embodiment in the classroom. What does lead to change? Or, does asking that question already contain within itself its own inability to encourage learning, and/or other forms of growth, change, emancipation, communication, and the continual celebration, stewardship, and reverence for the commons? This is at the heart of the academic enterprise, fraught with confusions and far-reaching implications.”

Wow, how prescient was Bill Pinar (2003) when he wrote in *What is Curriculum Theory* of “the nightmare that is the present”? Surely he had no idea what that nightmare would be some years later, and how much more apt this description of our “thrown moment” this has become. He invited us, urged us, to become “temporal” subjects of history, living simultaneously in the past, present, and future – aware of the historical conditions that have shaped the current situation, engaged in the present battles being waged over the course and direction of public education, and committed to rebuilding a democratic public sphere. In our own journal, Dennis Carlson (2005) reviewed Pinar’s book back in 2005, highlighting that one of the reasons why we face the “nightmare of the present” has to do with the fact that we have been silent for too long – at least as public intellectuals. We have gone about our business, building our academic careers out of scholarly journal articles, feeling protected in the academy, and essentially letting bureaucratic state elites (now in league with corporate elites and religious evangelical leaders) take over the public schools. But progressive teachers and teacher educators must do more than take on bureaucratic and corporate state elites in taking back their profession. Pinar argued that we also need to take on the continuing legacy of racism and misogyny in America, and, critically, that we must address the “deferral and displacement of racism and misogyny onto public education” (Pinar: 9). I would add that we have completely neglected our obligation to impact on public pedagogy as well, retreating to the seeming simplicity of teacher education even as we bemoan our decreasing voice in that process. We are hiding out in schools and departments of education when we truly need to be taking leadership roles in media studies, performance art, community development, marketing, entrepreneurship studies, cultural studies, and political science, because each of these fields of practice and their associated academic fields of study are, at heart, nothing more than curriculum. This point was well-articulated years ago when our colleagues moved away from the “foundations of

education” – subfields with curious titles like “philosophy of education”, “sociology of education” and “history of education” – and established the vitality of scholarly genres with more appropriate descriptors: the pedagogy of philosophy, the educational studies of history, the *education of* entrepreneurial action, and so on. As I look around this room, only a few of us restrict our professional scope to the training of teachers for public schools. Many of us understand education in far more meaningful ways that include serving on the board of a community arts organization, consulting on political campaigns and community organizing efforts, analyzing the societal transformations effected by and with social networking, and designing new platforms for urban development.

Each of these kinds of personal and professional action center what Donna Breault and Louise Allen describe as “beginning, continuing, and enacting conversations [that] emphasize the need for stakeholders to build relationships with one another in order to advocate for and act on behalf of ... students and communities.” Their view is that stakeholders create and support an infrastructure for change. The recent collection of essays edited by Diane Caracciolo and Anne Mungai (2009) on the African concept of *Ubuntu*, a humble togetherness in facing shared responsibility, helps us understand that such an ethical and spiritual commitment, with its propensity to value humility and human dignity without imposing a set of values on “an-Other”, can act “as principles for pedagogic engagement, and as a guide to living within an ethic that places responsibility for social and ecological justice within a web of interrelated collectives (p. 13).” A person *is a person* through their relationship to others.

These kinds of individual and professional action also toss us into a Sargasso Sea of double binds where the desire for change – in those dreams upon which individuals act, every day practices, institutions, bureaucracies, ethical presumptions, or imagined possibilities – requires a reliance on beginners who must act as if they have already completed an apprenticeship, as if they are *already* prepared to apprentice others. In other words, we are presuming a sort of autonomy defined by Kant as “enlightenment” when we jump into the fray. Alice Pitt (2010) quotes Kant in her recent Educational Theory essay as follows:

Enlightenment is man’s release from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not the lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding. (Kant, in Pitt 2010: 4)

As Pitt points out, many have characterized Kant’s confidence in the power of reason to surmount obstacles as misguided or worse. He believed not only that education is imperative for the development of humankind, but also that education must at the same time develop, itself, through subjecting itself to critique. The double development, of course, is fundamentally paradoxical, since insight depends on education and education depends on insight. Pitt eloquently describes how the achievement of maturity, the ability to use one’s understanding without the guidance of another, becomes even more elusive when the immaturity of the individual meets the immaturity of the profession. So when we act, as do so many of us, with the presumption of change, amelioration, transformative leadership to use the title of the lovely text by Jim Henderson and Rosemary Gornik (2007), we are reaffirming, and reconstituting in practice, the presumption of enlightenment autonomy and the reign of reason, and denying the complex issues that arise as the “reality of reason” refuses to conform

to wish, desire, pleasure, and the psychic trauma of an autonomy that cannot be used – autonomy experienced not as thinking and reason but as abandonment, which Pitt reads through Freud as the helplessness of annihilation, dynamics that can be expressed but not resolved by the claims of reason, or, we should note here today, the autonomous actions of a reasonable scholar activist in curriculum studies.

The specter watching over us in every session at this conference is the trickster critiquing the Enlightenment ideal of individual agency, choice, and emancipation, the joker who is shifting our attention to dynamic and complex modes of relationality—human, ecological, and international, asking us, “What does it mean for re-envisioning curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching?” “What does this mean for public pedagogy? For community development, interactive web-based social action? For transformative uses of street theater? For entrepreneurship?” If questioning the dominant tide of globalization leads to a nuanced focus on the intricate patterns of global interdependence that is both nurturing and improvisationally creative, is it possible that the relational dynamics of the individual, the local, and the global become mutually liberating? What possibilities can such a shift to modes of relationality and global interdependence open up in our curriculum work?

Recent curriculum studies scholarship has once again challenged the efficacy of enlightenment as an assumption of educational studies. Challenges to the emancipatory potential of a “pedagogical stance” demand that we examine how the field of curriculum studies works with, through, and around these critiques to address critical issues, questions and crises of our cultural and historic moment. In other words, what does it mean for *your work*, for the conversations taking place in the particular session you are in at any given time this week, that Jacques Rancière’s (1991, 2009; Bingham & Biesta 2010) critique of the pedagogic stance has been floating in the ether for about 20 years? The translation of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* appeared in English in 1991.<sup>1</sup> One of Rancière’s basic points is that trying to teach someone something is likely to lead to the failure to meet one’s goals. In the more recent *Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière (2010) demonstrates how Brechtian and Artuadian theater, ordinarily seen as the two most readily available options for emancipatory performance, are doomed to fail because of the maintenance of the pedagogical stance: the very act of assuming that your audience, your students, your target group “needs to know” or “needs to be motivated” or “needs to take action” constructs that group as ignorant, passive, and incapable – immature in Kant’s words, needing apprenticeship, needing the teacher, intellectual, performer, program designer, etc., in order to “come to know” , in order to “learn” , “awaken” , “take action” , and so on.

I think we really need to consider the implications for our work here. What can we do if the very advancement of our field is based on telling people what we know in order to give them what they don’t already have? (The very enterprise of a conference is grounded in the desire to be known for an original idea.) As Alan Block wrote way back in (1998), just because I offer you a gift doesn’t mean you are going to want it, or even use it as intended. I give you a box of markers and you leave them in the restaurant where we met for your birthday lunch; or you take them and use them to build a model of a solar power unit when I expected you to create a beautiful mural for a school entrance hallway. We are left publishing and publishing our articles, and teaching and teaching our courses, and meeting and

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<sup>1</sup>I first heard of Rancière from Molly Quinn, and recommend her chapter, “Committing (to) Ignorance: On Method, Myth and Pedagogy With Jacques Rancière” in Malewski (2011) for more on this. I am pleased to see that Bingham and Biesta (2010)’s Jacques Rancière: Education, truth, emancipation is receiving this year’s AERA Division B Outstanding Book Award.



meeting at conferences, and who takes these gifts as we wish? Did you need those markers or want to make a mural? Does anyone *want* to change what they are doing in education? Are cries for reform really begging for *your or my* ideas, rather than being a political maneuver to bankrupt public schooling while reaping huge profits for appendage industries of accountability and professional development, now enhanced as new tactics for the broader project of union busting? If so, I have a host of old publications we can recycle, as do many of us here in this room. *Children's Books for Grown-Up Teachers: Reading and writing curriculum theory* (Appelbaum 2008) won an AERA Outstanding Book Award in 2009, and earned me a rousing \$2.94 in the last semi-annual royalty statement; soon to be remaindered at a bargain price, I am sure we can give it away and all of its ideas about creating a new, nomadic epistemology that avoids the binary quagmires of contemporary educational theory while helping educators make meaning in their work can be met with a lackadaisical ennui and bewildering blank demonstration that this "gift" is really not sought. We can build a fantastic on-line library of such resources that are not sought. Should we do this? Oh wait, *we are doing this*. And what it leads to is the creation of people as students of our wisdom who are passive and need to be "taught" rather than people who are acting for the creation of ethical communities, people who do not appreciate or even acknowledge our "gifts". Gems of wisdom without an audience. And in the process, the pedagogical stance enacts and perpetuates a hierarchy of privilege:

Equality is not a goal that governments and societies could succeed in reaching. To pose equality as a goal is to hand it over to the pedagogues of progress, who widen endlessly the distance they promise that they will abolish. Equality is a presupposition, an initial axiom – or it is nothing. (Rancière 2004: 223)

Yet as my students in Ear Cleaning, an experimental music course, know this semester, part of the job of every artist who thinks about the relationship questions, those questions about the role and function of audience, that is, the *pedagogical stance*, is to generate the audience they want, because *we deserve it after all that work*. Who do we want as our audience? Let's go out and *get them* and then see what they do with what we make or set in motion with them. I am reminded that many of my students *are* doing amazing things: dramatic changes in the organization of classrooms, collaborations between urban and suburban districts, new integrations of mathematics and social studies in their high schools, and so on. The seeming gap between exciting innovations locally and the demoralizing rhetoric in public discourse is what is bugging me here. The ongoing rants about educational reform and accountability do not do justice to the vibrant teaching and learning and powerful forms of professional growth that I experience locally. What the local action research projects have in common is that the teachers involved have gone out and taken action in their community to effect change.

In fact, this form of action is a powerful kind of curricular structure that I believe has great potential (Appelbaum 2009). In my own research, it is in the taking action phase of particular forms of curricular structures – designing and carrying out an interaction with an "audience" outside of the group or class - that much of the learning takes place, and in which the facilitator or teacher can take on the role of Rancière's "ignorant schoolmaster" with a complete faith in the student, ignorant of the students' possible ignorance. This is part of a larger project on the structuration of structure, independent of scope and sequence or pedagogy, in which the character of taking action powerfully influences the experience of being part of the group. Students taking action, like their teacher, are

ignorant theater impresarios, presuming themselves that the audience is already spurred to action, does not need to be taught, is *not* ignorant, is not passive. In “taking action” we become people through our relationships with others in the group, and in forming relationships with others outside of our group, as we work to make an impact on the world, or find people who can make an impact on our own work. In the spirit of Ubuntu this “transcendence of alterity”, as I have learned through my work with the Spiral Q Puppet Theater in Philadelphia, ... “Builds strong and equitable communities characterized by creativity, joy, can-do attitudes, and the courage to act on their convictions.”

This of course is Boal’s (1995) insight: that people can come together both inside and outside of the pedagogical stance while being neither inside nor outside of that stance, and change themselves in the process, creating this (theater) community, becoming “who they are” through their relationships with others. And it is also Deborah Britzman’s dramatic explication for how education “is a place where the world is disclosed, not just when we meet our curriculum but in how this disclosure meets our own inclinations” (Britzman 2009: 122).

In taking action in the community, members of the group apprentice in the apprenticeship of others, in ways that nomadically take advantage of their immaturity and maturity while simultaneously denying both their immaturity and their maturity, where the leap to ignorance makes action possible. To take a quote from William Wraga slightly out of context, but in a spirit with which I believe Wraga would share, “curriculum is more than a conversation; curriculum is a realm of action” (Wraga 2003: 17).

So I propose that we, the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, *must take action*, with people outside of AAACS, in order to make an impact on the world, and in order to have those people have an impact on us, to live in the spirit of Ubuntu. Sure, many of us engage with community projects, schools, reading groups, and so on. We need to take our experiences with such work and figure out how we can work as the association for the advancement of curriculum studies to engage more fully with particular audiences and groups. We need to collaboratively design a curriculum for *ourselves*, to design ways that we are designers of a field of curriculum studies, that is, to orchestrate ways that we can design forms of community where the people who are the community act, themselves, as designers of communities where people act as designers. It is in the process of taking action that we can *become*, and I urge us to begin *right now, in the following ways*.

Let’s use tonight’s reception to begin conversations about how AAACS can take action – not just discuss the commons, but impact on the commons. Can we propose and pass a policy statement at this year’s business meeting? Organize a project across our communities that brings people together in action? Take on ethically critical issues and work in consort, not just in parallel in our home contexts? Let’s use our sessions this week to make connections to these possible projects. Sign up for lagniappe sessions to work on a collaboration that can be proposed at the business meeting. Have conversations about how we can *meet* together with others, and not just agree on common ways to teach courses in our own little worlds. Use our Town Hall on Thursday to generate conversations that lead to action, and go to lunch with the Publications Committee to talk about ways that AAACS publications can make an impact on the world: One way to prepare for action is to develop strong annotated bibliographies of work by AAACS members on specific topics and themes, promoting our work for each other, and advancing the field; another form of action would be new forms of publication – paper, web-based, in video form, and so on, which target those issues that grew out of previous conference work on the commons, and on the latest trans-national crises of the nightmare that is the present.

Finally, the executive has planned for a substantial component of our business meeting to be devoted to working groups that will help to set the agenda for the remaining two years of our joint term, so I urge you to bring these new action projects to those working groups and make them happen.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to our conversations – tonight and throughout the week!



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