

## HOW DO BOUNDARIES OF DIFFERENCE PARTICIPATE IN DEFINING CURRICULUM?

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*The Making of Indigeneity: Curriculum History and the Limits of Diversity*

Ligia (Licho) López López/ Routledge / 2018

1. Suppose in your mind a really “good” educational program, or policy, or arts project, or plan to support and empower people—in your current community or somewhere else in the world. Imagine, too, that this program/policy/project/plan is *the* most *woke*, post-colonial, self-critical project—ever.

Well, sorry; but there are all sorts ways in which your fantasy, right now, is already structuring kinds of people, places, objects, and agency, each of which carry with them historical legacies, epistemological assumptions, categories of knowledge and ignorance, and, beyond these, stuff that we can’t even yet articulate. These inadequacies, disappointments, and frustrations will haunt us as the seeds of problematic effects soon to emerge and spread like cataracts into even seemingly unrelated places and actions one cannot yet even perceive or imagine.

2. Now suppose in your mind a good will effort to recognize and dignify indigenous cultures.

Well, sorry, but watch and wait: your good idea is fraught with historical contexts and methods of structuring policy and practice that will only amplify unseen forms of failure and inadequacy.

*Lo Indigena*—the indigenous—is a collection of effects of classifications, categories, differentiations, recognitions and forms of identification or study—it/they is/are a construction of social scientific practices that turn things—stuff around in the world, people, actions, and so on—into the subject of study and/or policy, the object of study and action, independent in many ways of the manner in which these things and people and institutions and so on were the subjects in their own actions on each other and other things and people

and so on ... before and during the scientific/policy study of them.

3. Do not despair, though! Because Licho gives us a delightful and inspiring set of methods to use in better understanding how this comes to be! For example:
  - Ian Hacking's five-aspect dynamic framework of analysis: classifications, people, institutions, knowledge, and experts. These can be locations of "events" whose effects are the production of objects, things, and kinds of people.
  - Read this book to see how the method can be used to study how the indigenous, *lo indigena*, are the effects of such classifications, people, institutions, knowledges, and experts.

This is a textbook by illustrative example of how one might go about such a research project. The point is not to use this book to find Ian Hacking and then go use that method—it's the way Licho actually enacts this kind of analysis, weaving historical artifacts and contemporary practices, that makes the work so rich.

4. Educational institutions, curricula, policies, and the people who make them, are the subject and/or the object of those classifications, people, institutions, knowledges, and experts; the participants in them, such as "learners", "administrators", "teachers", "teacher educators", and so on, are all "realities" *made* in processes Licho calls events, after Deleuze.

An example: the professionalization-of-reforms of the mid 1990s in Guatemala. The official statements declared that indigenous populations have a right to quality education. The methods of achieving this according to certain institutions were declared de-legitimate by some subjects of the policies. Rationales for the efforts indicated various needs of the country, specific populations, and so on.

Licho invites specific sorts of knowledges into the conversations about these events so that we can better understand the construction, in the assemblage of the events, of *lo indigena*. Critical to the analysis is that it is not a story of a government or authoritarian regime against oppressed or resisting communities; "authoritarian regimes" are, rather, in this book, "notions, discourses, performances, aspirations, and desires that produce a particular order and are generated from multiple locations from within and beyond the state-communities binary" (p. 141-2).

Another example: Licho met Daniel, Yenifer, Rafael, and Higinio Marcelo in teacher preparation classrooms and Mayan family homes. They were some of the student teachers and youth discussed throughout the book. They met each other through a project called *Mira*, which fostered an interregional exchange via the composition of a compelling exhibit of 233 archival images. The youth had been told that these archives of images tell untold stories; the

possible stories were generative, and set up among these curators concerns about how the eventual exhibit would create a visual story about “Guatemala”:

Before *Mira.* is shown in the United States, Australia and Guatemala, its thirty-three images will meet secondary and high-school students in these countries with shared and ambivalent histories like those told and being made by *Mira.*: indigenous stories, stories of aboriginality, genocide, multiculturalism, “undocumented” immigration, resistance, invasion, incarceration, removal, but more importantly the multitude of other stories that can only emerge when art meets young people with important cultural legacies that must invent ways to communicate at the limits of the depleted languages currently in existence. Through a process of visual transformation, transfiguration, and transcoloration ... the young people will respond to *Mira.* They will talk back to those who made the images, the images’ objects, the histories that produce the image; anything and everything their encounter with the images provokes. (p. 176)

This is an upbeat, dare I say, hopeful story near the end of the book. It echoes what some might call practices of dignity, recognition, and reconciliation, which are also technologies of *lo indigena*. What strikes me about the *Mira.* project that makes it different from other stories assembled throughout the book is:

- *Youth* are asked to curate the representations and generate the exhibition. While they may have applied methods and constructs of coloniality to their work, perpetuating the reconstruction of these methods and constructs, they are the agents of analysis rather than the subjects. Throughout the analysis carried out by Licho, *lo indigena* are referred to simultaneously as subjects and objects of social science and policy gazes; although these youth are for Licho and us, now, objects of study, they are clearly subjects with agency in the *Mira.* project.
- The *youth* rather than credentialed adults or bureaucrats, are “in charge” of both the analysis and production of knowledge, and in the talk-back generated by the project, as agents of trans-national and trans-cultural critique, and as witnesses to dignity and reconciliation.
- Participation in the construction of a subsequently pedagogical event, the traveling exhibition, is itself a pedagogical event.
- The exhibition can claim to conform to any official bureaucratic policy with particular goals, as, say, a literacy event supporting the Ladino-ization of *lo indigena*, yet is itself also *not* designed to conform to such policy goals; it is an exemplary Deleuzian *nomadic* curriculum that co-exists with official practices and structures and is also highly revolutionary as pedagogy. It is a standard curriculum of history and literacy, while also a direct challenge to whatever policies and practices of history and literacy pedagogy are in official support of this curriculum.

- Existing outside of the education for global economic competition, this project also coexists with and yet is independent of the romanticization of indigenous cultures and languages, which so far have, according to the research reported in this book, reinscribed the practices of coloniality associated with expert anthropological and socio-psychological expertise that mostly appropriates official support for indigenous language instruction for the potential to generate an educated workforce to serve the economy.

I am left wanting to know more about this project and others that have probably been growing since the research for this book was completed. I want to learn how the kind of research characterized here can generate principles of dignity, recognition and reconciliation that coexist as a *transformation of* and *with* coloniality rather than simply perpetuating it.

5. The power of the “no closure” final chapter of the book that I find most compelling is the return discussion of *eventalizing*.

“Eventalizing” (p. 171) is a “style of inquiry historicizing how differences become salient and move, insisting on the study of differences in motion as contested, varying, and unstable. The ostensible focus of this book, *lo indigena*, becomes in this sense an event that is perceivable through moments of intensity, marked at time of historical contestation. Licho leads the reader into a clear understanding that eventalizing is not only a method of historicizing and concretizing differences as always in trajectories and flows of change, but as is a “political proposal to continue setting in motion that which runs the risk of becoming set within containable borders” (p. 171). Here I agree with Licho that it has become increasingly imperative that curriculum studies dwell on the permanent contestation over differences and their boundaries, and to add a critical question to those previously proposed as constitutive of curriculum theory itself: How do boundaries of difference participate in defining curriculum?

It may never have been enough to ask such questions as “what knowledge is of most worth?”, “Who gets to decide this?”, and, “How do our responses to those first two questions matter?” The making of indigeneity requires us to pursue this *a priori* question come what may: “How do boundaries of difference participate in defining curriculum?”