

AN ONGOING INVITATION: SPECULATIVE FICTION, CURRICULUM STUDIES, AND CRISIS

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This issue continues our ongoing dialogue on speculative fiction and curriculum studies. We kicked off this series in [volume 13, No. 2 \(2019\)](#) with articles by [Noel Gough](#) and [John Weaver](#). Some scholarship in this vein uses SF as a medium through which curriculum studies might reimagine education. It sets up a retrodictive role of an SF imaginary, and associated theorizing of actions that could lead to the utopian or dystopian future envisioned (Weaver et al., 2004; Appelbaum 2010). Other curriculum studies scholarship reads SF literature more explicitly in and of itself as preeminent texts; these texts often clarifying concepts and practices via the blurring of boundaries among ‘scientific fact,’ science fiction, and critical understandings of problems and issues in science, technology and society (Gough, 1993, 2020). Indeed, there is a strong thread in curriculum studies that uses popular media other than those labeled “science fiction” — pop music, mainstream popular novels and films, manga, children’s literature, games, horoscopes, and more. Harvesting such “texts” for theories and metaphors creates an expanded sense of “speculative fiction” as public pedagogy (Sandlin et al., 2010).

In this issue, Brittany Tomin contributes her students’ reflections on their world-building project as an antidote for hopelessness and helplessness. The world-building project described here suggests curricular and pedagogical pathways that confront fear with hope, toward forms of creating community in an age of existential upheaval. Students are engaging with speculation and their own texts. A lovely parallel rumination stemming from speculative fiction as pedagogy, Brittany Tomin proposes, is the value of embracing opportunities for students and their teachers to be surprised by their own learning.

Readers are invited to continue the conversation with their own submissions. In the spirit of JAAACS, I ask you to evoke the scholarly context from which your own contribution emerges and to discuss these relationships in dialogue with other works in the field — such as Nalo Hopkinson, Cathy Cohen, Sun Ra, Karen Anijar, Ken Schneyer, Elizabeth Ellsworth, and Jessica Langer — as well as those published

here. (For references, consult [the previous editorial introduction in volume 13, no. 2 \(2019\)](#)).

This particular moment of publication also invites consideration of the role and potential of SF/Curriculum to anticipate and respond to global crises. Have the millennia of speculative and science fiction failed us as a pedagogy of global preparedness for massive pandemics? It would seem the answer to that question—as it is for climate change and the destruction of the planet itself—is a definitive YES. Speculative fiction, in all of its forms, whether as literature, film, music, video game, etc., has arguably buttressed the role of school in establishing passivity as the lesson learned for how to confront global crises—at least on a large scale. The individuals hailed as heroic in their attempts to serve as modern prophets of doom are sublated by the tales of the post-apocalypse. We have learned three lessons well: (a) the end is coming, no matter what those individuals do; (b) there will be a future for humanity afterwards anyway, so it will all work out in the end, even if it looks really bad to us now; and (c) those bad futures are only so many fictions after all; we cannot really know what it will be like, so it might be best not to worry too much. The lessons, over all, are perhaps to simply accept dystopia as the present and future reality, to which the best response is little or no response. Is the imagining of new communities, as proposed by Brittany Tomin, up to the task? Should something more be added into the mix? If so, what?

Is the lesson of SF that we should passively accept crises? I look forward to more constructive participation than I have laid out in this paragraph in future submissions to this journal thread. I invite you to contact me with your questions or ideas at appelbap@arcadia.edu.

References

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