

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Now a year past the publication of our most recent issue, we find ourselves continuing to reflect, as Patrick put it then, on “gestures of human connection that are tensed, much like currere, through the past, present, and future of our public and private selves” (Roberts, Editor’s Note Summer 2020).

The annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies was held online again this past spring, creating resonances with the discussion Hannah Spector and Todd Price published then on the circumstances that might allow for, even support, ethical engagement in a hypermodern, technologically connected world—as well as the risks at hand.

The racist horrors that had sent people into their streets throughout the world last summer continue, and their reverberations remain within us. In response to those protests and the recorded images of the licensed violence that ignited them, which many of us had struggled even to believe, we at *JAAACS* called for a special issue

... framed to consider the intersections between curriculum theory and antiracist pedagogies in both theoretical and practical terms. In what ways do the texts of our field speak to the racialized dynamics and tensions we encounter in our schools and classrooms? What resources do they provide for thinking and acting in an antiracist manner and for teaching antiracist perspectives and practices to our students?

Four of the articles below were submitted as responses to this call. Two others represent related papers presented at the AAACS meeting this past spring. Different in focus and approach, these six papers share a concern with the questions above, particularly the final question about where in our work as curriculum theorists we find resources to help make things better and to heal ourselves.

These six articles also represent a departure from the pieces we typically publish at *JAAACS*. Rather than engaging primarily with texts, ideas, and thinkers many consider central to the curriculum studies field, these articles assume a more tentative, reflexive approach characterized by thought-in-motion and ideas-in-progress. Some unfold as complicated explorations of the challenges associated with calling into question the

assumptions and practices that undergird their own anti-racist pedagogy, activism, and scholarship.

Certainly, we have remained aware throughout of the potentially explosive nature of all work on racial oppression and its cures in this country, even within the bounds of our professional community. Good people, moving from shared aims, reject the lenses employed in each other's efforts and shy from engaging generously with work that feels unacceptably partial or limited to them. Despite that, as curricular theorists, we are likely to recognize the inherent partiality, and therefore limitations, of all views—and, too, our need to speak with each other in order to broaden the perspectives we hold.

Our first article, "A Praxis of *Currere* and Contemplative Inquiry in an Externalizing Space of Dialogic Encounter," by Jason Bulluck and Leslie Smith Duss may speak most directly of a specific approach to and the character of work involved in explicitly seeking to broaden our own understandings through dialogue in this way. In their piece, "The Limitations of Being a Good Antiracist," though, Badenhorst and Shim also implicitly evoke the power of shared reflection as a dimension of introspection, drawing also on the lens of *currere*. Both pieces evoke the generosity of spirit such encounters require.

In her article, "Utilizing Traditional African Oral Storytelling to Counter Racist Pedagogy," Osei-Tutu gathers stories of an African immigrant family to the U.S. employing a method rooted in the African oral tradition, which involves a "co-telling and co-meaning making" process. Situating new methodological forms within non-Western epistemologies also suggests new visions of transactional possibility among us.

In a related manner, systems thinking can suggest new approaches to reorganizing our worldviews. In their article, "Integrating Eisner's Conceptualization of Curriculum with the Four 'I's' of Systemic Racism to Promote Anti-racist Praxis in Education and Beyond," Paul Madden and Anne Vera Cruz present and discuss a pedagogical framework they have been developing to help their "students understand systemic racism as a complex, interconnected system within our collective spheres of influence".

Emergent understandings of the systemic and interpenetrating dimensions of racism, though, provide only a beginning to the work of dismantling these realities. In their article, "Is CRRP Enough? Addressing Antiracism(s) in Teacher Education," Mark Currie, Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, and Aaron Sardinha Drake argue the need for broad community engagement in any ongoing enactment of anti-racist pedagogies.

The final article in our special issue, “Critical Black Futurism: Affecting Affinities within Curriculum Studies,” by Patrick Phillips, responds both to the call for new horizons of possibility that organized this issue and also to those that inspired our Special Section on Speculative Fiction, created by visiting editor Peter Appelbaum. Peter introduces this piece here, the fourth in our series, in which Phillips advances *critical futurity* as a resource for speculative thinking within curriculum studies.

In closing, we share with the JAAACS readership the award letter recognizing Dr. Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), as the recipient of the 2021 Division B: Curriculum Studies Lifetime Achievement Award. The Lifetime Achievement Award Committee’s decision to recognize Woodson in this way represented a departure from past precedent: never had the award been given posthumously. Our editorial decision to include the award letter, as well as the remarks delivered by ASALH Executive Director Sylvia Cyrus, who accepted the award at the 2021 Division B Annual Meeting, is meant to encourage continuing conversations about the field’s ever evolving sense of its complicated history, its current configurations, and its future dimensions.

Susan Jean Mayer and Patrick Roberts