Curriculum in International Contexts: A Complicated Conversation

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Introduction
Ashwani Kumar

This paper offers a multifaceted and dialogical engagement with my book, *Curriculum in International Contexts: Understanding Colonial, Ideological, and Neoliberal Influences* (Kumar, 2019). The book emerged from two decades of my academic work on education in international contexts, as well as from my ongoing dialogues and conversations with scholars, students, and colleagues regarding contemporary issues related to curriculum, teaching, and learning. In this book, I examine the dangerous and deep-rooted impacts of colonial, ideological, and neoliberal influences on contemporary curriculum development in diverse international contexts such as India, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, Canada, and Eastern Asia. Drawing upon the literature and my own theorization, I articulate four theoretical responses – Indigenous, critical, autobiographical, and meditative – that can challenge these deleterious influences. I emphasize how intellectual movements such as Marxism and postmodernism have influenced curriculum and

teaching in varied political and economic locales. Given its focus on the unique and diverse conceptualizations of curriculum, *Curriculum in International Contexts* contributes to the internationalization of curriculum studies as a field of scholarly inquiry (Pinar, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2014a, 2014b 2015).

This paper provides an avenue to continue the dialogue and to extend the complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012) around the internationalization of curriculum studies (Pinar, 2014a) with particular attention to the insidious influences on curriculum (e.g., colonialism and neoliberalism) discussed in the text and the enduring and evolving educational theories, concepts, and practices that can challenge these influences. In this paper, I have invited a group of seven scholars to share their thoughts on the book. This is a very diverse group in terms of their focus of research and theory as well as their stages of academic career. These diverse scholars engage with the text from a variety of perspectives including post-human, postmodern, Black feminist, critical discursive, and critical theory to deepen the responses to the colonial, ideological, and neoliberal influences on curriculum development.

This is a unique paper as it has emerged from the four symposia that I organized to have a dialogue about the ideas that I shared in this book. This paper is an example of how dialogical meditative inquiry (DMI) – a contemplative research methodology that I have developed to conduct subjective and intersubjective qualitative research (Kumar, 2022; Kumar & Downey, 2018, 2019) – can be useful in deepening the academic conversation. DMI implies an existential and meditative engagement between or among participants to inquire into the subject matter that interest them. It demands the capacity to listen holistically, a respectful disposition towards others, and a deep desire to inquire and understand the profound meanings of phenomena, concepts, and experiences that we encounter in our life. In this instance, DMI facilitated a deeper engagement with my book under discussion.

While I was preparing the manuscript of this book, I took help from four research assistants – four of them were doctoral students at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU), and one was then a doctoral student at University of New Brunswick. Each of these students expressed a deep interest in the contents of the book and especially in the idea of meditative inquiry – four of them are contributors to this paper. Inspired by their interest and my prior work on the notion of dialogue as a way of exploration and research, I organized a symposium on the pre-published manuscript of the book and invited these five doctoral students to have a conversation with me in November 2018 as part of the Faculty of Education Colloquium Series (Kumar et al., 2018). At the symposium, I was moved by their thoughtful reflections on my ideas and appreciated their serious engagement with my work. I particularly enjoyed responding to their questions on the book – I found the questions to be thought-provoking and stimulating. After the symposium, I asked if they would want to write a paper with me where they will share their reflections on my book and raise questions to which I will respond. They agreed.

The book was published in 2019, and thanks to the Aids to Scholarly Publication Grant from MSVU and support from Dean of Education, Antony Card, I organized another symposium on this book with two faculty members (who are also contributors to this paper) and one high schoolteacher. This time the symposium was open to the entire MSVU community and the public. I organized this symposium during one of my BEd Holistic Teaching and Learning course classes as students really appreciated attending the symposium that I planned for my previous book, *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry*, in 2013 (Kumar et al., 2013). The second symposium on the book was very well-attended and was video recorded (Kumar et al., 2019). I was again touched by

the seriousness with which each panellist studied my work and shared their reflections on it. The dialogue that happened with the whole group was particularly very engaging. We all loved hearing pre-service teachers' responses to the text and panelists' comments as well as engaging with their intriguing questions. After this panel, I invited the panellists to be contributors to the paper that I had been working on with the PhD students.

I submitted a proposal for the third symposium on this book to the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies annual conference (May-June 2020) at the University of Western Ontario to share the ideas with a wider audience. A group of panellists from the previous two symposia were able to participate in this submission, and Sean Wiebe kindly agreed to be the chair and discussant for this session. While the proposal received very positive reviews and all the panellists were excited to share their thoughts and ideas at the symposium, the conference was cancelled due to COVID-19. However, an abstract of the symposium was published by the *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* (Kumar et al., 2020). I submitted a revised proposal for another symposium on this book to the annual conference of the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada (CIESC May-June 2021). The session was well attended, and we had a robust discussion on the key themes of the book.

This paper showcases the thoughts of those panellists in the symposia described above who were interested in contributing to this paper. Each contributor articulated their thoughts on my book independently to maintain the uniqueness of their perspective and posed their questions regarding the contents of the book. I read each reflection gratefully and carefully and then shared my responses to the questions from each contributor. Finally, all the reflections on the book and my responses were read by Antony Card – who was present in the audience for the two symposia and who actively participated in the discussions on the book. Antony was also a panellist at the CIESC symposium. In the discussion and conclusion section of this paper, Antony shares his thoughts on the book, on the reflections shared and questions raised regarding the book by each contributor, my responses to each contributor's questions, and the dialogical meditative inquiry process that we adopted to put together this paper.

I am deeply grateful to each contributor for the thoughtfulness and the dedication with which they have engaged with me in this complicated conversation; this paper would not have been possible without their contributions. The textual dialogical meditative inquiry was as stimulating and intriguing as the face-to-face communication during the symposia. I hope the readers enjoy and benefit from the following reflections and discussions regarding the colonial, ideological, and neoliberal influences on curriculum internationally and the ways we can challenge them in our own unique political, economic, geographical, cultural, and educational contexts.

Resistance Through Black Feminism, Africentricity, and Anti-colonialism
Susan M. Brigham

In this section, I reflect on Ashwani Kumar's book *Curriculum in International Contexts: Understanding Colonial, Ideological, and Neoliberal Influences* (2019), responding to the ways it resonates with my own work, theory-building, and teaching/learning experiences. Drawing on my understanding of Black feminism, Africentricity, and anti-colonialism, I highlight the ways in which Kumar focuses on the power of curriculum and the power invested in curriculum. I discuss the South African context (which is Chapter 2 of Kumar's book) by reflecting on my observations

visiting that country over the past 10 years and the key concerns raised through a historical analysis of the colonial and the apartheid processes. I conclude with some suggestions for change that resonate with Kumar's.

> [The subject of geography] opened my mind to the world of concepts, insights, and perceptions, which allowed me to study and understand how human beings across the globe have come to relate with and connect with nature, and how this interaction has brought about a diverse, unique, and rich cultural heritage around the globe. (Kumar, 2019, p. 2)

While Kumar is referring to geography, these words can describe what I believe we all hope to gain through education: "opening minds to concepts, insights, and perceptions;" "relating with and connecting with nature;" and understanding "diverse, unique, and rich cultural heritage around the globe". Unfortunately, when looking around the world, including here in Canada, we must acknowledge that there has been in our educational systems a narrowing, not a broadening of understandings. In other words, there has been an opening of minds to <u>selective</u> concepts, insights, and perceptions; developing an understanding of how <u>selective</u> human beings connect with nature and advancing an understanding of <u>selective</u> cultural heritages. How and why does this happen? The hegemony of colonialism, Eurocentricity, White Supremacy, patriarchy, and elitism allow the persistence of inequities. Inequity becomes a habit. Hierarchies of power and privilege have been reproduced in family households, in everyday practices, social relations, and in institutional and state policies. As a feminist, I draw on feminist theory to give me the critical insight into mechanisms of power, and to analyze how gender influences people's expectations, roles, and identities. Black feminist thought helps bring into focus the intersectionalities (Crenshaw, 1989) of race, sex, sexualities, class, ethnicity, age, ability, and nation and how intersecting systemic barriers collude to disempower some individuals, communities, and groups while empowering others. As an educator, I try to be attentive to the subtle and not so subtle forms of educational institutional power.

Kumar offers a critical site to begin an analysis of education – the curriculum, which he defines as: "a concept, a document, or a lived experience" (p. 7). I agree with the importance of this centre of analysis and the need to understand how curriculum is

> controlled, shaped, and influenced by: the culture in which it is situated, political and religious ideologies that have sway over it, the market to which it intends to or is expected to cater, and the teachers and the students who interpret and engage with it and create it in their everyday lived contexts. (p. 7).

Curriculum is the boss text that gets reified and over time harder to loosen and flex. Essentially, the formalized school systems' Eurocentric, patriarchal, racist, and exclusionary curriculum that colonialists imposed on people in countries around the world is maintained in contemporary times. The curriculum may appear less obviously racist, sexist, and classist and perhaps there has been some inclusion of certain concepts and theories, and perhaps additions of a few more historical perspectives but the essential core stubbornly remains. For example, in Nova Scotia some high school students may have the option of taking Mi'kmaw Studies 11 or African Canadian Studies 11, but these are electives and may not be offered in all schools or in both English and French, which means a child in Nova Scotia can go through 13 years of schooling without taking such a course. Moreover, even if a student was able to take one of those courses, they may have a teacher who has no deep understanding of the course content (Benjamin, 2014). Additionally, such a course could really only provide a "snippet" of culture and history (Benjamin, 2014, p. 222). The message is clear – that these two studies are not sufficiently relevant or valid to be centred in the

curriculum; they belong on the margins. Yet, not all students, their families and communities passively accept this message. Hence, I would add that in addition to Kumar's call to understanding the power of curriculum we must also strive to understand how students and their families actively resist, challenge, thwart, and defy curriculum. An example of this is the Indigenous communities around the world who for centuries have been raising awareness of the ways in which colonial formal curriculum has resulted in epistemic violence and cultural genocide, where colonizers (through state and church) have actively, physically, and ideologically used curriculum to subjugate, control, dominate, and repress Indigenous populations.

In Canada, residential schools were designed to "take the Indian out of the Indian" (Benjamin, 2014, p. viii). Using terrorism and dehumanizing the Indigenous peoples and dismissing their knowledge of "math, astronomy, physics, biology, and chemistry," fishing, trapping, hunting, gathering, as well as "their practice of medicine" (p. 5) has had lasting generational impacts on Indigenous learners. These communities have been demanding control over their own schools and pushing for curriculum changes for years (Archibald, 1995; Assembly of First Nations, 1988). Recently the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC) (2015) further amplified the voices of Indigenous peoples in the calls to action. One call for action titled "Education for reconciliation 62(i)" refers to curriculum. It says:

> We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to… [m]ake age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students. (p. 7, TRCC, 2015)

The call for action is now 5 years old and the change in curriculum is moving at a snail's pace. To see the change there needs to be a political will; a deeper understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being; an openness to learning from Indigenous groups; and a removal of the blinders of racism, White supremacy, and Eurocentricity.

In Chapter 2 Kumar focuses on South Africa where educational reform has been underway also at a slow pace. The chapter discusses the impact of colonialism that involved Christian churches and the racist apartheid system that assumed some people are naturally superior to others and some people are sufficiently human to be considered citizens under law while others are not. Kumar examines the "extraordinarily complicated and painstaking process" (Kumar, 2019, p. 43) of educational reform and some of the most significant complications that stand in the way of "creating the ground for a relevant and purposeful education for South African children" (p. 43). Once the anti-apartheid movement was successful and a hard-won post-apartheid constitution was ratified in 1994 there were great expectations for positive change, equality, and democracy, but thirty-six years later these great expectations have yet to come to fruition.

I have been traveling to South Africa over the past 10 years, and have had opportunities to visit schools and universities, chat with students, parents, teachers, community workers, professors, and administrators and observe the residue of the old oppressive system. For example, I gave a talk at a university in Cape Town on critical race theory and was surprised by how the campus populations was entirely Black and Brown. I thought all universities had opened their doors to all of the (superficially racially designated) groups. I came to understand that while they do open their doors in theory and policy, there is still a reluctance for transformation. Some campuses still hold more prestige compared to others. According to the Black and white professors I spoke with, there is an apparent reluctance for some professors to move to a new campus, and

students likewise may choose their campus based in part on the ethos of the university and which universities have professors who look like them and can relate to them.

When I visited a school in the Cape Flats District in Cape Town, I began to understand the level of violence people in the community of all ages are exposed to and caught up in.

> This district constitutes large housing projects in Cape Town built previously under apartheid for so-called 'Coloured' communities …characterised by concentrated poverty, and high levels of substance abuse, violence, crime, and gangsterism (Loots, 2005; Okecha, 2011, cited in Khan, 2013, p.4)

An ex-gang member brought a group of us from a conference to visit a school situated amid rival gangs called the Americans, Hard Livings, Fancy Boys, Dixie Boys and others that fight to control the drug trade of 'tic' (crystal meth) and other drugs. In the Cape Flats district, "systemic violence stems primarily from gang involvement as well as sharing the markets in the substance industry, resulting in rivalry for territory and clients" (Khan, 2013, p.i). Our guide pointed out the community swimming pool, library, and playground that are each under the control of a different gang. He also pointed out the men on every corner who patrolled the gangs' borders. For the residents, avoiding gang members and gang involvement is impossible. The schoolchildren dressed in coats and woolen hats in the unheated classrooms (for it was June and a cold winter day) were excited to see us and shared with us their hopes and dreams of the future about becoming a math teacher, an engineer, a nurse, and so on. According to the teachers and community workers, most of these students are suffering post-traumatic stress syndrome; traumatized by the violence around them, including the murder the night before we arrived of a teacher from the school. In a six-month period, nearly 2000 people were killed in violent crimes, most caught in the crossfire of rival gangs. On many occasions, the police call in support from the South African National Defense Force (SABC News, 2019). Khan (2013), who interviewed youth in the Cape Flats District, supports the teachers and community workers' observations. Khan's participants reported that "being subjected to violence results in post-traumatic stress symptoms, impaired psychological functioning, and maladjustment" as well as feeling anxious for younger children living with violence in the community (p. 48). Our guide explained that gangs recruit children who are showing academic promise, which may make striving for schooling success a dreaded endeavour. While wealthy tourist areas are walking distance from the Cape Flats, there seems to be no escape from the area. Indeed Robins (2000, p. 412) describes the Cape Flat residents as being "trapped in dangerous spaces". The situation in the Cape Flats District is a result of the apartheid system; while apartheid is over, its influence continues.

In contexts like these, one may wonder about the hope for change and the role of education. Yet, Kumar ends the chapter with a ray of optimism for the

> South African curriculum theorists [who] have been making commendable efforts towards creating the ground for a relevant and purposeful education for South African children by critiquing the instrumentalist, colonial, and discriminatory nature of the curriculum reforms and by emphasizing the significance of Indigenous cultures, egalitarian ethos, democratic education, and contextual pedagogy. (p. 43)

In addition to creating, analyzing, and reforming the curriculum for children we need to do the same for adult education curriculum including the nonformal and formal curriculum. Moreover, it is vital to simultaneously examine pedagogy, for there is hope in the subjugated and subversive pedagogies that have the potential to "liberate minds, ideas, and practices" (Dei, 2019, p. 21). Africentric and Indigenous pedagogies have been denigrated over time rendering Indigenous and

African peoples, their living legacies, and epistemologies as inferior, primitive, and barbaric. African-centred pedagogy legitimizes African knowledge; strengthens ties with community and promotes community service; encourages positive relationship building; "imparts a world view that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying the self-worth and right to self-determination of others"; and stimulates critical consciousness (Lynn, 2005, p. 134). It reflects Ubuntu relational philosophy *I am because you are*, which derives its power from spiritual connection to all relations with love at the centre of our interconnectedness (Mucina, 2019). To practice Ubuntu is to reclaim and centre Indigenous knowledge in decolonizing efforts (Mucina, 2019).

To conclude this section, I, like Kumar, see hope for change in the education system, within and beyond schools, in curriculum and in pedagogy for the youth and for adults, as well as in other state supported systems (justice, health, migration, and so on). This requires dreaming big. "We must have a vision of the educational future we want in order for us to strive for it. … The whole idea of educational futurity is to be able to dream new ways of schooling and education… Dreaming must be a 'metaphor for resistance' anchored in the anti-colonial realm of spiritual resurgence" (Dei, 2019, p. 22).

Questions & Answers

Susan Brigham: What is the link between meditative inquiry and spirituality?

Ashwani Kumar: That is a great question. In my view, meditative inquiry and spirituality are very intimately connected. To me, being spiritual implies understanding oneself and one's relationships to other people and nature deeply. Meditative inquiry is an existential process of becoming aware of oneself and one's relationships in day-to-day living. It allows one to connect with oneself and others and nature at a deeper level and brings about a sense of compassion, care, creativity, and wholeness within oneself and in one's relationships, all of which I consider to be spiritual qualities.

Susan Brigham: Change seems to come about in slow motion, which frustrates those who are living in oppressive violent circumstances. Can you comment on the importance of the notion of time for transformation and meditative inquiry?

Ashwani Kumar: It seems that oppression and violent circumstances that you speak of, Susie, have always existed in human history but their contexts, locales, and manifestations may differ. The oppression, I feel, exists because there is no real sensitivity to the insight that when I hurt others, I hurt myself; when I hurt other cultures, I hurt my own culture; and when I hurt other nations, I hurt my own nation. Because of our divisive conditioning and self-centeredness, many of us have been unable to see that we are all very deeply connected despite the geo-cultural variations. If we see this, then the root of oppression, which is the division among human beings due to one factor or the other, will end in our hearts. And if we are not oppressive within, we cannot be oppressive outside because we will realize that hurting one is hurting all. If one is really earnest, this realization can happen instantly. However, we do not have this realization at our very core because we are not very earnest in going through inner change. In the absence of this realization, we approach oppression outwardly and structurally through laws and policies, which can only slowly bring about a modification of oppression rather than a real change in the heart of

the people. Real change requires a deep meditative inquiry to understand and dissolve centuries of conditioning influences that have divided human beings along racial, religious, and nationalistic lines (see Kumar, 2013).

The Place of Ideology and Discourse in Curriculum in International Contexts
Mohamed Kharbach

As a research assistant in Kumar's book project, I had the chance to read the book multiple times and interact with its ideas first-hand. Each reading would unravel new insights and bring me closer to a nuanced understanding of Kumar's conceptualization of curriculum studies. To say the least, the experience has been very illuminating and insightful. Coming from a background of linguistics and language studies, Kumar's book *Curriculum in International Context* constitutes an important addition to the theoretical and methodological arsenal underlying my doctoral research. As such, and in line with the dialogic approach emphasized in Kumar's works (e.g., Kumar, 2013, 2019; Kumar & Downey, 2018), my section contributes to the unfolding dialogue around *Curriculum in International Contexts*, a dialogue that started with Kumar's (2018) symposium in Mount Saint Vincent University in which the graduate students that took part in this project discussed and shared their views about the book. I engage with some key ideas outlined in *Curriculum in International Contexts* in light of my scholarly and research background.

In his discussion of the forces that influence and shape curriculum, Kumar (2019) cited three main forces: ideology, colonialism, and neoliberalism. He convincingly substantiated his arguments with examples of curriculum studies from different countries including Brazil, Mexico, India, South Africa, and Asian countries like China, Japan, Malaysia, and others. Similar curricular experiences can also be noticed in other countries, though in varying degrees. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, religious ideology is the dominant force that exerts the most control over curricular policies. These policies have been the object of critique over allegations that they promote a culture of violence and extremism. Following a wave of international pressure, the Trump administration stepped in urging its close ally, Saudi Arabia, to conduct a general overhaul of the contents of its textbooks. In a report published in Reuters last year (2018), it has been claimed that "Saudi Arabia has made little progress in removing textbook content that promotes violence and hatred towards religious minorities and others." On the other hand, in the Moroccan context where I am originally from, the colonial influence is the most prominent. Morocco was under French military colonization for several decades until the mid 1950s when it finally got its independence. Since then, French colonial influence has been predominant in almost all sectors of life: the economic, the social, the cultural, the political, and the intellectual. French language has been the official language of instruction in schools for many years. It was only until recently that the Arabisation movement spearheaded by a number of influential intellectuals and public figures has succeeded in countering this linguistic colonialism and minimally downgraded the status of French. Yet, French is still the language of instruction of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and is also present side by side with Arabic in all official administrative documents. Decolonization struggle is still ongoing to this day.

When reading *Curriculum in International Contexts*, I noted the intersection of Kumar's work with my own research focus. We both depart from a critical stance that problematizes knowledge production and questions the taken-for granted and commonsensical assumptions about reality and the social world. In many instances in the book, Kumar refers to curriculum as being a

multifarious text, or as he stated, "a historical, political, cultural, autobiographical, and economic construct" (p. 7) which, I believe, is a postmodern conceptualization that also underlies my own approach to critical discourse analysis. Likewise, in my own research, I start from the premise that language is never neutral and every instance of language in use, as James Paul Gee (2011) argues, is inherently political. My understanding as developed from this book and from my readings into the field of discourse studies is that curriculum is involved in relations of power, hegemony, and ideology. In this sense, curriculum is a social practice and a mode of social action whose purpose is to intervene in the way the social world is ordered. It follows, then, that curriculum is a discursive construct that is socially and historically situated. It shapes and is shaped by the dialectical relations it maintains with other social actions. I maintain that the discursive dimension has been accorded a marginal position in Kumar's book. I argue that an engagement with the discursive component in discussions about curriculum studies can potentially shed light on new insights and further enrich these debates. Curriculum, after all, is essentially a piece of text, a discourse genre. Analysis of its language can help in deconstructing the political, social, and ideological structures underlying it.

Another important point I would like to raise here is about the concept of ideology which, as Kumar contends, figures among those influential forces that shape curriculum. Given its centrality in curricular discussions, ideology, I believe, requires more theoretical elaboration in *Curriculum in International Contexts*. We, the readers, are left to speculate about the potential meanings the term ideology carries in the context of this book. Admittedly, ideology is an elusive and controversial concept that can mean different things in different contexts. Also, ideology has various conceptualizations; for instance, from a Marxist perspective, ideology carries negative connotations, it represents "false consciousness" (Miller, 1972). For some scholars such as Van Dijk ideology is not always negative, it can also be positive and productive (Van Dijk, 1993). My contention is that a clear explanation of this concept would have clearly demarcated the contextual territory within which ideology operates in *Curriculum in International Contexts and* would also have demystified the ambiguity surrounding its polysemic nature.

All in all, *Curriculum in International Contexts* constitutes a valued addition to the field of curriculum studies and provides significant insights into the interplay between curriculum and other forces mainly ideology, neoliberalism, and colonialism. I am deeply indebted to Kumar for having me be a part of the team that worked on this project. The learning journey has been very fruitful. Kumar's philosophy of meditative inquiry has particularly piqued my intellectual interest. I found his ideas of the importance of 'inner consciousness' and its role in understanding our positionality in the world very intriguing. As Kumar (2019) argued, it is only through understanding our inner selves through critical and reflexive introspection that we get to comprehend the world around us. For me, as a doctoral researcher, this meditative practice means a deeper engagement with my own motivations, biases, and subjectivities, not to bracket them and feign an unrealistic position of the researcher as objective producer of knowledge but rather to embrace them and make them visible. It is this form of visibility that "makes it possible for one to see that what appears to be merely outer problems ... are in actuality tied intimately to the way the inner consciousness flows, to how one thinks, feels and acts on a daily basis" (p. 11). Indeed, the concept of meditative inquiry has introduced me to an unconventional way of doing research, one that is grounded in ethos of 'meditative awareness', self-reflection, freedom, and creativity (Kumar & Downey, 2018).

Questions & Answers

Mohamed Kharbach: To counter the three influences on curriculum (i.e., ideological, colonial, and neoliberal) you proposed the Indigenous, critical, autobiographical, and meditative responses. How about a discursive response, one that highlights the importance of discourse and language in decolonizing curricular knowledge?

Ashwani Kumar: That is a very good question, Med. I think the critical response that I discuss in my book draws on a variety of critical traditions in social theory and philosophy including critical theory, critical race theory, postcolonial studies, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, among others. The discursive response is extremely important. It draws on various critical traditions, and it helps us understand the structure and process of discourses that influence curriculum, teaching, and learning. While I did not articulate it separately in the book, I think a critical examination of the curriculum and educational discourses that I carried out in my book, at least to some extent, serves as a discursive response. However, I acknowledge that I could have done more work in that regard, and it is an important area to work on. One of my students has carried this work out in the context of Libyan educational policies (see Zayed, 2020). Her work shows the power of discourse and discursive response.

Mohamed Kharbach: The construct of ideology figures among the central concepts in your discussion and since it is a highly elusive concept whose meaning is context-dependent, I wonder what do you exactly mean by ideology in the current context of your work?

Ashwani Kumar: In the context of the present book, ideological influences include political, religious, and cultural forces that have sway on the process of curriculum selection and production as well as implementation in the classroom. It implies government control of curriculum and teaching, and the way dominant cultural and religious organizations influence the government to shape curriculum in light of their own ideological preferences. I have discussed how these factors influence curriculum in teaching through various examples in this book.

Curriculum at the Precipice of Dystopia
Adrian M. Downey

In a recent paper, Roger Saul (2021) introduced the notion of teaching "at the precipice of dystopia". Driven by the abysmal state of our current social, economic, environmental, and political reality, Saul was not the first to acknowledge that within our lifetimes, the world as we know it will no longer be possible—that all markers of our present reality will give way to something new, or simple fade into absence without rebirth. Saul's novel contribution, however, is in articulating the duplicity of continuing to perpetuate narratives of meritocracy or predictable career and life pathways to students. That is, how can we tell students that if they work hard, they can achieve their dreams when the reality of their future may be much darker than we can even imagine?

In *Curriculum in International Contexts*: *Understanding Colonial, Ideological, and Neoliberal Influences,* Kumar (2019) brings a rigorous, complicated, and contextualized understanding of the fundamental problems that have brought us to that precipice of dystopia.

Through the study of neoliberal, ideological, and colonial forces in education in a variety of countries, the patterns of our crises begin to emerge. We start to see the trademark moves toward standardization and accountability-based funding popularized by No Child Left Behind and solidified by Race to the Top. We also see the movement toward the de-professionalization of the teacher based in what Pinar (2012) might call the anti-intellectualization of education through the attempted removal of subjectivity from knowledge – in other words, the dominance of Tylerian rationality in our school systems. Kumar shows that these are international phenomena, but they have intimately local manifestations. In Nova Scotia (Canada), for example, Pamela Rodgers' (2018) doctoral dissertation, *Tracing neoliberal governmentality in education: Disentangling economic crises, accountability, and the disappearance of social studies*, clearly shows that over the past 20 years, regardless of the government that has been in power, the educational trend has been precisely toward neoliberal accountability and standardization. This, I would argue, has been the pathway to our possibly dystopic future.

As educators, we must all wrestle with these issues, and each of us must come to our own understanding of how best to move forward in what some are calling the posthuman convergence – the combination of the Sixth Extinction Event and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Braidotti, 2019) – a moment at which we have arrived through the relentlessness of neoliberal capitalist expansionism both in society and education. In Kumar's text, he offers four potential responses to the factors listed above: The Indigenous, the critical, the autobiographical, and the meditative. Each of these offers a potential response to the problem of educating with a dystopic vision of the future, whether a return to living in balance with the land, a radical redistribution of wealth, a phenomenological and psychoanalytic understanding of one's experience, or a deep, holistic, judgement-free understanding of who we are. These responses are not exhaustive, nor are they mutually exclusive, but they are, I think, useful.

For some, so dark is the dystopic future that moving forward in any way becomes a burden. How can we continue to act, to teach, to create, and to wonder when it will all eventually become meaningless? One response is that we must continue to operate within the confines of our present reality until a new one makes itself clear. For me, this response is too easy – it allows us to continue along the personal and ideological pathways that have gotten us into this mess in the first place. I call this complacency. Another, perhaps the more morally ethical response, is that of Herman Melvil's Bartleby the scrivener, who when faced with any demand of his participation in society broadly conceived uttered the simple phrase, "I prefer not". Bartleby died by what I read as his moral conviction to disengagement, but this strikes me as an impractical approach to adopt on a wide scale.

Like me, I suspect Kumar would be satisfied with neither these options. I know from our dialogues (Kumar & Downey, 2018, 2019), my study of his previous work (Kumar, 2013, 2014), and our many conversations, that his own approach is to live and teach dialogically and meditatively – to help those around him understand themselves on a fundamental level. And while this may not ultimately save us from our dystopic future, I think it serves as a necessary disruption of the ideas of disengagement and complacency.

Through this new text, Kumar has offered curriculum studies an expanded view of our journey toward the current precarious and uncertain moment. Where previously he concerned himself with our internal landscapes and those fragmentations that have caused societal crises (see Kumar, 2013), here he has shifted his focus outward into the world and detailed the external manifestations of our internal crises particularly where education and the study of curriculum are

concerned. But throughout this work he has also given us responses, both intellectual and, if we listen carefully, practical, to ideology, neoliberalism, and colonization, and I argue to the problem of educating at the precipice of dystopia.

Questions & Answers

Adrian Downey: There is a growing body of evidence (e.g., COVID-19) that suggests that there will be, within our lifetimes, some incredible shift and/or decline in the quality of human life. I have, following the lead of Dr. Roger Saul (2021), referred to this broadly as a dystopic futurity – a realistic visioning of the future that centres a dystopic collapse of dominant social, economic, environmental, and political ways of being. In light of this, I ask: To what degree do you agree with the premise I have articulated above? You have stated that you believe the world is in crisis (Kumar, 2013, p. 1), but what is the character of that crisis? Are we likely to see a dystopic end to the Western way of life within our lifetimes?

Ashwani Kumar: Yes, it seems to me that we are headed for a very problematic future. We have been unable to find any lasting resolution to our many problems including wars, racial discriminations, antagonistic nationalistic relations – even where relations between nations appear amicable, they are primarily based on economic alliances rather than based on trust and love and can break as soon as economic security is threatened. Additionally, the large-scale acceptance of a western lifestyle and goals of economic development – which are primarily based on growth models and undermine ecological balance – further take us towards a dystopic future as the resources that we have cannot sustain us forever at this rate of exploitation. In fact, our lack of respect for waters, forests, and air and their gradual destruction is very explicit in our contemporary world. In the wake of COVID-19, which has caused the entire world to come to a standstill, nature found a breathing space to regain the balance that human beings have destroyed in the name of development. Hardly any political leaders have spoken about the need for a slow pace of life so that Earth and its inhabitants may live a peaceful and balanced life in harmony with nature. Everybody is desperate to return to a "normal" which was nothing but abnormal. I am not, however, undermining the acute difficulties millions of people have had to go through due to this pandemic.

Adrian Downey: To what degree have the three factors that influence curriculum (i.e., the colonial, the ideological, and the neoliberal) contributed to the decline of western society? More broadly, how has the education system led us to what I have termed "the precipice of dystopia."

Ashwani Kumar: To a great degree. Colonialism, and the capitalistic greed in which it is rooted, laid the foundation for destroying cultures and ecologies around the globe. It is a major factor behind the suffering of the world. Ideological and political control does not allow us to challenge colonial and hegemonic notions and thus force most of us to comply with self-destructive and unsustainable economic models. Neoliberalism, a heightened form of capitalism, has further paved the way for our collective destruction by considering nature and its benedictions as well as human beings as collections of "resources" (rather than spiritual beings). The goal of neoliberal capitalism is to produce more and more without much consideration for the psychological (stress and anxiety) and ecological implications of so-called productivity. As I have argued in my book, education has

been a victim of all these influences. It has lost its purpose of bringing about holistic and integrated individuals and, thereby, is a contributor to the dystopic future.

Adrian Downey: If we truly are at the precipice of dystopia, how can educators prepare students for that which comes after the collapse? I am particularly interested, here, in the potential alternatives represented in your four responses to colonialism, neoliberalism, and ideology, namely: The Indigenous, the autobiographical, the critical, and the meditative.

Ashwani Kumar: These responses can be helpful in challenging and controlling the movement towards dystopia. Together, they provide us with a mind and heart that may deal with challenges that we face as human beings at personal, relational, cultural, structural, and ecological levels. They can help us to deal with destructive realities in a holistic manner.

Perspectives on Internationalizing Postmodernism and Posthumanism
Amélie Lemieux

My theoretical perspective is informed by the current landscape of posthumanist research as it relates to curriculum studies and literacy research. The latter increasingly accounts for relationality in learning, accounting for the centrality and role of non-humans and more-than-humans in literacies research. In light of this turn, how is posthumanism accounted for in internationalizing the curriculum? In this section, my focus on the word 'internationalizing' is semiotically-oriented. The locus of 'international' rests between nations, focusing in a somewhat ambivalent space of ideas of retention, to arrive at some sort of truths about education and global curricula. This is where human values – about education, culture, languages – are negotiated. This is also a space where power relations are enacted. What if education framed researchers as decentralized, yet critical human entities, and how would nations (nation-states, universities, research bodies) reconcile that role in producing knowledge? To answer this question, I focus on Kumar's (2019) historical depiction of postmodernism and the shift to posthumanism that ensued. Then, I propose avenues to consider humans as entangled entities with species, non-humans, and more-than-humans.

In chapter 7 ("Postmodern Turn in North American Social Studies Education: Considering Identities, Contexts, and Discourses"), postmodernism is framed as the conditions through which relationality occurs within socio-political, cultural, historical, and economic situations that shift over time (Kumar, 2019). One key contribution of this chapter is the focus on decentering the notion of "objective truth" to privilege, instead, a rhetoric of relationality in teaching and learning. This consideration is generative in thinking about learning as a state of continuous, dynamic relationality as opposed to a fixed entity whose only purpose is to be assessed. Building on these parameters and vectors helps us understand the conditions of teaching and learning in literacy classroom settings by disrupting the idea, for example, of such idiosyncratic and vague notions as reaching "students' *full potential*". Taking this a step further, postmodernism solicits important to counter inflexible notions often found in research. As a response to Kumar's (2019) chapter 7, I note how meditative inquiry promotes an awareness of others and the self in relationality which is in line with the tenets of posthumanism[9].

The turn to postmodernism slowly emerged as a result of the May 1968 events led by French philosophers Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and their colleagues who,

at that time, were considered initiators of intellectualism in the humanities. Key postmodern texts, such as Jean-François Lyotard's (1979) *Postmodern Condition*, crystallized the emergence and institutionalization of postmodernism, with related contemporary texts such as Barthes' *Death of the Author* and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. Derrida's perspective highlighted how humans need to consider the messiness of ideas. This premise was made explicit in the theory of deconstruction, generating an understanding that there are some traces of truth in the truth's opposite. Things are often seen in dualities (e.g., high and low culture, visual over touch in the senses), but Derrida's point is that all counterparts should be equally privileged and both sides of the duality need each other to exist. While these dualities do not exist in posthumanism, they shed light on the equality of perspectives and symbiosis to some extent, with an emphasis of dismantling superiority of one concept over another. In posthumanism, this would translate as critically decentering humans to generate relational humanisms, in embodying that humans operate in conjunction with other species. This drive away from logocentrism brings forth the value of confusion and doubt – what Derrida calls *aporia* – to reject representational logic in communication. Critical posthumanism (Nayar, 2014) favours symbiosis and dynamic hybrids, which falls under Kumar's critical and Indigenous response to colonial, ideological and neoliberal influences on education. In parallel, Barad's (2007) agential realism and Rosi Braidotti's (2018) feminist posthumanism remind us that being human results from a hybridization of material and immaterial forces and 'data' (such as the genetic code) that permeate species, skin, animal function, plants, and humans. Postmodernism and the subsequent shift to posthumanism in the 1990s (with theoretical contributions from Haraway, Barad, Braidotti) proved useful for curriculum inquiry as they provide ways to deconstruct silos in education and see fields of inquiry and learning as cross-disciplinary. In breaking those disciplinary areas and working towards cross-pollinated fields, curriculum scholars can help shape tomorrow's future by generating collaborative and meditative inquiries in education. Teachers are too often trained to compartmentalize learning because school systems drive them to make sense of partialities on the daily – curriculum outcomes, behavioural reports, parent meetings, professional development days, planning, and so on – but the realities of contemplating a relational curriculum produced reflections on learning as rhizomatic as opposed to a problem that needs to be fixed (Lemieux & Rowsell, 2020a, 2020b; Sheridan et al., 2020). With meditative inquiry, one of Kumar's propositions, comes evidence to make sense of the world holistically.

By now, we know that literacy learning is dynamic, relational, and rhizomatic (Lemieux, 2020; Lemieux & Rowsell, 2020; Rowsell et al., 2018). How can this be actualized in global settings for an internationalized curriculum? My observations point to Canada's role as a nation-state to seriously consider Indigenous thought in education. Indigenous education echoes relationality with land, oral languages, histories, and knowledge, and it notices how humans play a complementary role to nature and species in education (Styres, 2018). For Canadian provinces to seriously do this work, stakeholders should enact work emerging from consultations, implement change in teacher education, and commit to professional development in schools with appropriate resources and funding. As Kumar (2019) puts it in his Indigenous response in the introduction of his book, such a framework works "towards restorative justice, and between people and nature by working towards restoring ecological balance" (p. 10). In so doing, we must remain critical of Western epistemologies (including postmodernism and posthumanism) by recognizing its affordances and drawbacks, answering Derrida's call for *aporia*.

Questions & Answers

Amélie Lemieux: What hopes do postmodernism and posthumanism give with regards to internationalizing the curriculum?

Ashwani Kumar: One key goal of curriculum internationalization is to celebrate diverse perspectives of how we understand curriculum and initiate a dialogue among these perspectives (see Pinar, 2014a). Given that postmodernism's and posthumanism's core concern is also to celebrate and respect diverse perspectives and to trouble binary concepts, they offer hopeful visions to guide the internationalization of curriculum studies.

Amélie Lemieux: What relationship exists between posthumanism and your idea of the "Indigenous response"?

Ashwani Kumar: While I am not an expert in either of these areas, based on my current level of knowledge, what unites Indigenous perspectives and postmodern/posthuman perspectives are their emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, their focus on questioning power and its abuse, their ecological sensitivities, and their respect for more than human. Together, they offer a view of education and life that is holistic and inclusive.

Reflections on Kumar's Inquiry Into Postmodernism's Role in Social Studies Education
Debra Wells-Hopey

In my reflection on Kumar's book, *Curriculum in International Contexts,* I will share my thoughts on Chapter 7 in which he outlines the significance of postmodernism and poststructuralism for social studies education. In Chapter 7, "Postmodern Turn in North American Social Studies Education: Considering Identities, Contexts, and Discourses," Kumar provides a robust discussion on the influence, or lack thereof, of postmodernism/poststructuralism on social studies education and the impact these ideologies have had (or not had) on social studies education research, curriculum theory, and teaching in North America. Kumar begins this chapter in a way that is useful to those entering a discourse surrounding postmodernism/poststructuralism. Kumar seeks to define these terms; or in the very least, sets parameters around what the traditional understandings and influences are which have given rise to that movement which we collectively agree (but not without inherent controversy) to be classified as "post" ways of thinking. Thus, the chapter begins with an introduction to the notion of postmodernism and traces the history of how and why postmodernism emerged as an important but often underutilized influence in social studies research and teaching. It strikes me as a most useful discussion to have, and his observations of how intellectual movements such as postmodernism have shaped (or not shaped) curriculum theory are particularly compelling.

Chapter 7 offers relevant examples of what social studies education looks like when employing a "post" framework. One can see, through Kumar's analysis, how postmodernist methodologies, research, and teaching are particularly relevant to a social studies curriculum, as they offer a contextual and relativist view, rejecting the positivist and empiricist insistence on objective truth discoverable through notions of objectivity, scientific method, logic, and

rationality; asserting instead that truth is found in diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural realities. Here, Kumar exposes social studies curriculum and educational research's traditional roots in positivistic and behaviouristic notions of reality, scientific truth, and knowledge. He shows that when one compares social studies curriculum with other areas of research in education it only peripherally participates in postmodern discourse. Unless there is a profound engagement and exploration into social studies education curriculum, the subject will continue to remain positivistic, outcomes-oriented, and instrumental. To contrast, Kumar offers examples of social studies scholars who counter non-post methods and work instead with diverse theoretical frameworks and methodologies such as gender, sexuality, family, multiculturalism, and so on.

Constructive aspects inherent to a "post" influence on social studies education, as explained by Kumar, include the situatedness found within political, historical, psychological, and cultural contexts, often unaddressed by traditional social studies education. Under a "post" ideology, social studies education is enlightened by notions of multiplicity, inclusiveness, and individualization of circumstance, exposing the ways in which social construction and notions of progress and power are inseparable. Ultimately, this means the loss of the "grand narrative," which has been the glue that has held (and in many cases still is holding) the social studies curriculum together. Employing postmodern themes, methodologies and theories in the social studies classroom has been transformative, as Kumar shows in many examples from the current research.

What I really appreciate is that Kumar does not just leave the discussion here. He opens the door to a critique of his critique, offering examples of how "post" treatments may not be fully adequate. He claims that while "post" discourses have much to contribute to social studies education research and teaching, there are also areas where these goals and purposes need scrutiny. Chapter 7 is a discussion that captures the intense and inherent complexity of "post" theories' influence on education as is evidenced by Kumar's following queries. To summarize, it could be that:

- Postmodernist thinkers may tend to conflate modernism and positivism. Kumar explains how such thinking is valid in some ways, however it may be a "throwing out the baby with the bathwater "situation (as Marxism, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and critical theory also fall within the gamut of modernist thinking).
- While postmodernism is sympathetic to issues of social injustices, it does not fully explore why injustice exists in the first place. For example, there is a lack of discussion of the expanding empire of capitalism through neoliberalism and neocolonialism as directed by the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.
- There is little concern over the issues of war, nuclear crisis, and ecological problems. It is important that these problems be part of the postmodern social studies research agenda.
- There may be room for a "defence" of grand narratives. While understanding the contextuality and situatedness of a problem is important, we can't completely ignore the significance of grand narratives. As examples, Kumar mentions the principles of capitalism and neoliberalism, which dominate a majority of our world and the behaviourist and positivist thinking which dominates most educational systems.
- One should question the purpose of postmodernism in social studies education. Is it to replace modernism? Or, is it to keep the core values of modernism such as social justice, freedom, and equality and help social studies educators see how the limitations of modernist thinking might be overcome? Is looking at modernism and postmodernism from

a dualistic lens a mere academic exercise or is it a valuable approach for remedying the problems?

For Kumar, postmodernism is an essential aid in understanding cultural contexts and situations from diverse and relevant perspectives. However, the author also provides important critiques and raises questions regarding the usefulness and limits of postmodernist thinking regarding social studies curriculum studies. In terms of educational research, postmodernism may be necessary – but is it sufficient? By offering a critique of his critique, Kumar presents a truly robust and rigorous analysis of "post" theories in social studies education and moves us towards an expanded notion of what may be required. Chapter 7 serves a number of valuable purposes, from an introduction to the very notions of postmodern and poststructuralist thought, to the importance of it to the social studies curriculum, to examples of successful "post" research and teaching methods, and finally to a questioning of post theories as fully sufficient in relation to the overall intent of social studies education. He claims that while "post" discourses have much to contribute to social studies education research and teaching there are also areas where its goals and purposes need scrutiny.

Questions & Answers

Debra Wells-Hopey: What separates an educational movement from an ideology?

Ashwani Kumar: In my book, I have discussed ideology as a collection of factors that control curriculum, teaching, and learning. For example, in many countries in Asia (see chapters 5 and 6 of my book under discussion here), education is under serious control by the ideology of the government as well as cultural and religious forces. Another example of ideological control is the neoliberal education reforms (e.g., the No Child Left Behind Act in the US) which have reduced education to numbers (Taubman, 2009). Educational movements such as the movement for democratizing education or the alternative education movement, in my view, are educational forces that question the ideological control on curriculum, teaching, and learning. They demand academic freedom for teachers and students and question and critique the measurement, comparison, and competition-oriented education. If followed uncritically, they can also become hegemonic ideologies. So, we must always be critically engaging with all worldviews and ideologies to ensure that they do not become hegemonic or normalized.

Debra Wells-Hopey: What is the place of a grand narrative in social studies education? Is it possible to form an understanding of events-through-time affecting a number of people without one? How many individuals must agree or believe in an occurrence or force before it becomes "grand"?

Ashwani Kumar: I am not against grand narratives and theories, as you have also noted in your reflection above. As academicians and theoreticians, it is impossible not to see how phenomena operate on larger scales. For example, neoliberal education reforms are a global phenomenon. We need macro-analyses to understand its nature and character. However, we cannot ignore the way it operates locally though. Neoliberalism may not look exactly the same in the US and in India. Local culture, politics, and social structures complicate and contextualize global forces. So, while we need grand theories and macro-analysis, we also need contextual and local analysis. Grand

theories become problematic when they begin to disregard local phenomena and circumstances, and when we impose theories on real situations without considering the complexity of those situations.

Debra Wells-Hopey: Your work on meditative inquiry may offer a potential resolution to these tensions through non-judgemental engagements with the inherently conflicted nature of human consciousness. Although not addressed in detail in this book as it is in your 2013 book, *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry*, meditative inquiry may expose how ideological influences operate within ourselves and how we relate to others. Is this a path towards overcoming ideological influence on social studies curriculum?

Ashwani Kumar: Yes, that is what I have proposed in several places in the book under discussion and in more detail in *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry*. In social studies education, we often focus on critical thinking and critical consciousness as ways of becoming aware of the social problems, issues, and conflicts such as racism and homophobia. However, we rarely turn our attention to how social discourses and conditioning influences that perpetuate injustices and discriminations operate in our deeper layers of consciousness. Meditative inquiry is an existential process of becoming deeply aware of our psychological structures and how they explicitly or implicitly affect our actions in day-to-day living and sustain division, hatred, and discrimination. So, I think meditative inquiry can contribute to understanding and challenging ideological influences.

To What Degree can the Curriculum be Free From Serving Power?
Mehrdad Shahidi

Concerns and contexts, agency, and structure (Archer, 2012), collectivity (Elder-Vass, 2010), the entanglement of humans in the materiality of things (Hodder, 2011 cited in Plumb, 2012), shared intentionality (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne & Moll, 2005), shared cognition (Plumb, 2012), the community of practice (Wenger, 2013) and many other terms and expressions reveal that humans and their societies are inseparably interconnected. This interconnectedness endlessly produces new *power* and *potentials* (properties) such as curriculum to control societies as well as to maintain and enhance the power. Curriculum is one of the products of this interaction that is created and used as a tool to legitimate and idealize the "power". In his book, Kumar (2019) argues that curriculum has been in the service of power of the nation-states historically. Considering that the power of nation-states is always embedded in the heart of culture, political and religious ideologies, and economic forces, Kumar (2019) demonstrated that

> Curriculum … is controlled, shaped, and influenced by the culture in which it is situated, political and religious ideologies that have sway over it, the market to which it intends to or is expected to cater, and the teachers and the students who interpret and engage with it and create it in their everyday lived contexts (p. 10).

Colonialist, ideological, neoliberal, and other historical types of curricula that were discussed in Kumar's (2019) book, *Curriculum in International Contexts,* are significant tools to serve the power of state through creating norms, endorsing, and enforcing norms. The curriculum

changes and reforms globally have been largely a result of such political, religious, cultural, and economic powers (see for example the evolution of curriculum in Japan, Brazil, and South Africa in Kumar's book).

Even though the historical trends in curricula reveal that the democratic curriculum has tried to challenge and change the oppressive nature of curricula by demolishing colonialist and other types of curricula, Kumar (2019) argues the colonial nature of curriculum persists insidiously and is more dangerous in combination with neoliberalism which has reduced the curriculum to a marketable commodity. Kumar's book (2019) shows that in any period of history, curriculum has been in service of power in one way or the other. This trend aligns with the theory of power (Foucault, 1975).

In this theory nothing can be separate from the power (policy) (Foucault, 1975). Thus, educational systems are fully in service of power through establishing three forms of control including hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. These forms of control, which were elaborated by Foucault (1975) are core techniques in service of authority (Gutting, & Oksala, 2019) or hegemony (Mayo, 2008).

A close study of educational systems reveals that these forms of control are embedded into each part of educational systems, particularly in the curriculum. Through the curriculum, the hegemonic power generates a framework of norms, beliefs, and ideologies and teaches people how to interpret the world based on its favorite framework. Therefore, it is the curriculum that normalizes thoughts based on what the dominant policy enforces, determines, and endorses. Also, educational systems play as the eyes of power in observing the results of the curriculum through examination. Since hegemony and domination have a non-static nature; that is, they are always renewable, adaptable, and changeable (Mayo, 2008), it is possible to observe these forms of control in each political epoch in Western or Eastern countries.

However, it seems that the Western world is going to re-establish its notion of the democratic system in which critical rationalism is powerfully galloping (Popper, 1966) to make balance in humans' power. In his philosophical theory of critical rationalism, Popper (1964; Agassi, 2019; Thornton, 2011) argued that people should use their thoughts and language to criticize their assumptions, hypotheses, beliefs, and ideologies that are supposed to shed light on the "truth". This criticism allows them to eliminate their errors and substitute more appropriate conjectures that increase the survival of mankind. Furthermore, this critical rational methodology can make people closer and closer to each other and increase their mutual understanding of truth. As Popper mentioned "I may be wrong and you may be right and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth" (1964, p. XII), the new way for democratic states is to use critical rationalism in each part of political systems. Seemingly, Popper's critical rationality provides people with different languages, ideas, and thoughts the analytical skills to understand each other and overcome hegemonic *frameworks*.

Considering that education in each nation-state enforces its favorite framework of thoughts, Popper (1964) emphasized that people who live in different cultures or civilizations with different paradigms of knowledge can communicate and understand each other reciprocally if they endeavor to begin a critical discussion with each other based on the critical rationalism. In this process they will find that the understanding of others is possible even very less. If their attempts become doomed to failure, their efforts will be fruitful and lead them to find new ways of understanding that is a type of higher level of knowledge and rationality to establish freedom for their societies.

However, even if we suppose curriculum is following the principles of critical rationalism, some vital questions remain unanswered.

Questions & Answers

Mehrdad Shahidi: To what extent can curriculum be free of serving power? Is it possible? What type of curriculum would it be if it becomes independent of power?

Ashwani Kumar: I do not think that the curriculum can ever be free of power and ideological control. Its selection, production, and implementation are imbued with power, ideology, and politics. Human beings are political creatures and as long as they view education as means of achieving their group's self-interests, they will continue to exert their power over the curriculum. As educators, it is our responsibility to study and reveal the complex ways in which the curriculum is controlled and influenced by the power of the dominant groups in society. This will help us raise the critical consciousness (Freire, 1973) of ourselves, our students, and our society to challenge and undermine the dominance of powerful elites over curriculum. This engagement is essential for democratizing curriculum and teaching.

Mehrdad Shahidi: Is it true that in each period of history we have a different kind of ideology that controls curriculum? Is not the present-day democratic curriculum also a form of ideological imposition?

Ashwani Kumar: Yes, I agree with you. Oppressor and oppressed conflict have always existed in one form or the other, and oppressors have always exerted control over what is worth teaching and learning. If the democratic curriculum is also a construct of oppressors, then it is nothing but merely an ideological imposition. But the very essence of the idea of a democratic curriculum implies a curriculum that is constructed through deliberation (Reid, 2006). The process of deliberation that is central to a democratic curriculum can also be seen as an ideology, but it is not dictatorial and controlling in nature. It is an emergent and inclusive process that provides space to the voices of the oppressed and, therefore, is capable of challenging the power dynamic. We cannot get rid of the discourse and ideology, but we can choose which discourses and ideologies are democratic, inclusive, and just rather than dictatorial, oppressive, exclusionary, and unjust.

Discussion and Conclusion
Antony Card

This paper has provided the opportunity to reflect on three symposia and commentary that followed the release of Kumar's book entitled, *Curriculum in International Contexts: Understanding Colonial, Ideological, and Neoliberal Influences* (Kumar, 2019). It is a great pleasure to be invited to try and capture the essence of the book and to reflect on the dialogue on the book that emerged in the symposia. This narrative provides reflections from applying the theoretical perspectives of Indigenous, critical, autobiographical, and meditative enquiry to a range of international contexts. It supplements and extends insights into the complicated discussions around the internationalization of curriculum studies. A postmodern stance suggests that to try and

adequately capture all aspects of this grand and deep project is not feasible and to attempt such an endeavour would delimit its potential. My response, therefore, is an enunciation of my journey within this project and the critical understandings that have resonated with me.

I perceive there to be three key tenets emerging from Kumar's (2019) book, the associate symposia, and papers. The first is that curriculum is not neutral; it is controlled and shaped by various forces. Curriculum has been shaped, controlled, and influenced by cultural, political, religious, technocratic, and neoliberal influences. Pinar's notion of curriculum as complicated conversation (2012) has provided a pathway for the authors and audiences in these discussions to illuminate the many differing influences and how they exist within multiple global contexts. Secondly, there is a realization that there has been hegemonic predominance of either imperialist or colonial influences over the education systems in the majority of global jurisdictions. This has resulted in the removal of culture, identity, and contextually rooted pedagogical approaches to learning. Thirdly, the commodification of learning has created situations in which the enterprise that supports learning and learning itself has become problematic. Learning, which is packaged and paid for and designed primarily for the purpose of future employment, is viewed by the authors of this paper as being antithetical to a natural process driven by curiosity and having the efficacy of emancipation.

Curriculum has been considered in this paper as a document, concept, and also a lived experience that has been formed and influenced by imperialist, colonial, and neoliberal forces. Brigham has also described it in our symposium as an epistemic and ontological violence, and she has highlighted the ways in which curriculum has been used to dehumanize and terrorize Indigenous peoples replacing their knowledge, culture, language, and truths with those of the colonizers. Our symposia also highlighted countries where curricula are being delivered in schools in the language of the imperialists or colonialists and not the native language. Kharbach has provided the example of French as the language of instruction of science, technology, and mathematical subjects in Morocco.

The influence of external agendas can also be seen within specific curricula in the Canadian context. In my own scholarly area of Health and Physical Education, I draw on the work of Dyson, Gordon, and Cowan (2011) and Lounsbery and McKenzie (2015) and others to show that Physical Education has a "chameleon" curriculum established on muddled thinking as it has attempted to adapt to a range of approaches and political ideologies. This has resulted in a swath of nomenclature to describe the subject that now includes terminology associated with (physical) literacy, fitness, coaching, kinesiology, wellness, and health promotion (Card, 2017). Similarly, Wells-Hopey has described in this paper how the social studies education curriculum will continue to remain positivistic, outcomes-oriented, and instrumental without deep and profound changes. In literacy education, Lemieux reminds us that, through digital literacies and co-creation spaces, there needs to be an awareness that an entanglement of non-human artifacts can contribute to the perpetuation of neoliberal agendas.

The symposia audiences raised important questions about how they could support change and engage in counter hegemonic practice. The four potential solutions of Indigenous, critical, autobiographical, and meditative enquiry have 'shone a light' on the unique influences on the curriculum. Popper's critical rationality theory has the potential to bring people with differing languages and cultures together to understand each other. Meditative enquiry provides a critical self-understanding as well as an understanding of social structures. It leads us to understand that the multiplicity of crises faced by contemporary society is not political or economic but rather a

crisis in consciousness. J. Krishnamurti's philosophies, in this regard, help us to understand that the pure role of education is the understanding of oneself and not an enforced neoliberal curriculum created by oppressors and processes of normative thinking. The pre-service teachers in our audience were provided with a number of pragmatic ideas to help them negotiate a challenging and often incongruous trajectory between a desire to pursue activism on these points and the constraints of professional codes of conduct. Suggestions included drawing on the diversity that exists within classrooms and bring different cultural heritages into the classroom. Further, connections can be made to world events pursuing the idea of opening the school to diversity that exists in the community. Brigham sees a role in getting students and families of students to actively engage in resisting and challenging the crisis that underpins curriculum development.

The timeline of the development of this project presents a unique opportunity for future thinking. Kumar's book was published in 2019 and the associated symposia held during pre-COVID-19 pandemic times. The presentation of this paper coincides with the global crisis having been present for more than two years. Downey posits that the colonialism, neoliberalism, and ideologies have led society to the point that he termed, "the precipice of dystopia". My assertion is that whatever the 'new normal' is, that emerges from this critical juncture in our history, the hope is that historical injustices associated with the hegemony of imperialism, colonialism, cultural genocide, white supremacy, elitism, and patriarchy can be corrected. The impossibility of disconnecting power, ideology and curriculum has been discussed by Shahidi and Kumar. Perhaps, the Indigenous, critical, autobiographical, and meditative enquiry perspectives, or a combination or extension of these may help to liberate societies and curricula in its various global contexts from the tyranny of the commodification of education and learning.

Notes

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[9] Recommended readings on posthumanism that build to some extent on postmodernism include the works of Rosi Braidotti (2018) on feminist posthumanism, Pramod Nayar (2014) on the post-sciences, Donna Haraway on cyborg culture, Jessica Ringrose, Katie Warfield, and Shiva Zarabadi (2018) on feminist posthumanisms and phematerialisms, and Jennifer Rowsell (2020) on posthumanism and affect in literacy education.

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