

## Curriculum Studies in Canada

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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That phrasing – Curriculum Studies in Canada - I choose over “Canadian curriculum studies” in order to emphasize the field first. But “Canadian” is itself too complex a concept to function as a clarifying modifier only. Like the field itself, Canada – Létourneau spells it “Kanada”<sup>2</sup> – is multivariate, in motion, its origin Indigenous then occupied by Europeans, now by immigrants from everywhere, all seeking a future freed from the past. Being freed from the past these essays – arranged in alphabetical order by author - make clear cannot occur unless the past is remembered, worked through, amends made. Truth and reconciliation define both the field and its present preoccupations.

“Where are we at, in this place and this time, as Canadian curriculum scholars?” Answers to that question – posed by Nicholas Ng-A-Fook,<sup>3</sup> the question of this collection – you can glimpse within. The book is, I emphasize, only a glimpse: after all, twelve essays, however broad their reach, cannot convey everything that curriculum studies scholars in Canada are undertaking as you read. While not comprehensive representation of the field, then, these essays, I suspect, come close - in topic, tone, intention. Those three interwoven aspects of contemporary curriculum studies I invoke to point to features of a field that can sometimes seem scattered and unrelated, even to those of us on the inside. I intend to test the assumption that: “Each academic discipline comprises a complex system of discursive practice that creates its own dynamics and follows its own laws of structural development.”<sup>4</sup> “Laws” does seem an overstatement for a field formed by the humanities and arts,

supplemented by social and political theory. Nomological laws are the province of the natural sciences, and of those social sciences that attempt to copy them, but they convey no aspiration of fields focused on particularity, however embedded in the particular the universal might be.

“Discursive practice” and “dynamics” and “structural development” may pertain, however, as being focused on the curriculum while contemporaries – even when culturally, generationally and in gender separated – does encourage confluences of “discursive practice” and “dynamics,” confluences that create at least the illusion of “structural development.”

Sweeping in scope, the topics testify to the problematics of the present, a present informed – often deformed – by the past, obvious in the case of environmental degradation, climate crisis, planetary (in)habitability: the topic two of the eleven essays address. A present deformed by the past is prominent in the matter of cultural genocide as well; truth and reconciliation are now disciplinary dynamics as well as the challenge of a national Commission. One essay is devoted exclusively to this topic, but other essays are also structured by these dynamics, evident when scholars acknowledge the land on which scholars work. (I am working on the ancestral land of the Nooksack People.) Cultural genocide has not been undergone by Indigenous Peoples only; settlers too have suffered this fate, depicted in the essay devoted to Francophone Canada. All cultures – in their anthropological senses – may be at risk today, if the technologization of everything continues unabated. Certainly the form of the school is threatened, as one essay makes clear. Teaching remains, if understood not only as “instruction” – imparting information, as the Internet can – but as “pedagogy,” making sense of “information,” enabling students and scholars to become knowledgeable, including about themselves. Several essays demonstrate “pedagogy,” often autobiographically animated, on occasion playfully enacted if always earnest, especially when conflict is concerned, another topic addressed along with sexuality. Topics not random nor free-floating in space; each is situated in place, in time,

in life history, History, culture, embodied and personified in human subjects, codified in school subjects, at least one – science - in the shadow cast by the behemoth below the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

That I would enlist “tone” to demarcate curriculum studies might strike some as odd given the legacy of neutrality and impartiality in scholarship and academic research, the shadow of a science that positions personality to the side, a prerequisite to finding what the facts reveal. Teachers, too, affirm respect for what they discover but about which they can become impassioned. Many curriculum scholars are former schoolteachers – almost all are now university teachers – and that professional passion is present in the presentation of even scientific research. Professional passion becomes intensified when the topic is something current and compelling, setting off in one instance an alarm, in another a lament, one writer wistful, another reprimanding, another indignant, almost all contemplative. Tone there is, perhaps part of the “affective turn in the humanities.”<sup>5</sup> Like its musical analogue, the tone of the prose to follow varies, sometimes within the same essay. But the sound<sup>6</sup> of scholarship is an indelible feature of curriculum studies in Canada.

Resolved not to commit the intentional fallacy, I make no claims about the author’s intentions, only about those intentions explicit in the text. Overall these are pedagogical in character, no surprise given many scholars’ prior school-teaching experience, given that almost everyone is teaching now. The essay as pedagogical is committed to truth-telling, not only in service to advancing knowledge in the discipline – in curriculum studies that is a somewhat uncommon intention (about which I have worried<sup>7</sup>) – but also to inform and explain, even to arouse students who, teachers hope, become engaged intellectually and emotionally in what they study and its possible relation to their lives and the world we inhabit. In that intention, tone and topic come into play, those two interrelated, tone in congruence<sup>8</sup> with topic. That congruence is sounded from the start.

## The Essays

“We are writing these papers in the midst of uncertain and difficult times,” Kumari Beck starts, citing the Covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests, anti-Asian racism, the ongoing climate emergency, and the 2021 discovery of the remains of 215 children on *Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc*, the site of the former Kamloops Indian residential school in British Columbia. These “impossibilities of keeping hope alive” - for “education generally,” for “curriculum more specifically” – constitute “incursions into the attempts I make to carry on work in the academy.” This writing is “borne of such vulnerabilities, the expectation that we continue to work as if nothing else was going on.” Beck testifies to “a sense of a collective, a collective that is a tapestry of storied strands, connecting one to another,” providing her a “feeling of gathering strength, and this gives me hope.”

Acknowledging the urgency of the present Beck returns to the past, recalling “key moments in my engagement with, explorations of, and practising with curriculum as international text.” The first occurred in a Ceylon (now Colombo) school where she was taught “the best of British literature, art, and theatre, Greek pottery, architecture, and plays,” as well as “the histories of ancient Rome, Greece and England.” Through such study Beck was “called into existence,” indeed “defined by what is now my first language, English,” a consequence of a “well-rounded, high-quality education that has enriched my life,” adding: “I was internationalized long before I left home.” Enlisting in the “army of knowledge conveyers,” Beck taught the curriculum she had been taught, “carefully reproducing the classrooms of my own teachers. Taking up the White Man’s burden, I taught the English canon with great care, never straying from the script.”

The second key moment Beck recounts was comprised of “cracks” in her teaching, cracks that appeared “many years later” while teaching new immigrants – carpenters and mechanics - in a private post-secondary classroom in British Columbia. Facing that class of “all men, I went blank,”

perhaps due to the “borrowed grey tweed suit that I had forced myself to wear (to appear the part), or a ‘feeling with’ this diverse group of men who, like me, were wondering how we came to be sitting in this grey and gloomy place (it was a rainy November in Vancouver), far from home.” Whatever the specific cause, “something snapped, and I slowly pushed aside the teaching manual,” starting instead a “conversation about what brought us there.” Beck remembers that “what happened next that day and for the rest of the three weeks” was an “opening up” to the creative tension that can occur in-between the curriculum-as-plan and the curriculum-as-lived.

The third moment – “entering and occupying the field” – occurred when Beck decided to study international education, a formalization of her childhood and teaching experience that “operated on principles such as relationality, reciprocity, learner-centred and liberatory education (Freire), and constructivism.” Again, tensions between curriculum-as-plan and as-lived occurred, in this instance between “the expectations of students and our intentions to be liberatory.” Questions arose: “Was constructivism an imposition of Western thought?” Why must students be encouraged to “break with the hierarchical relationships that they were familiar with in schooling in their home countries?” How could these tensions – contradictions – be addressed?

For twelve years Beck taught in a Master of Education program - teaching English as an additional language - designed specifically for international students. Beck taught one of the elective courses, “Current Issues in Curriculum and Pedagogy,” to mostly international students. She started her classes by asking: “What would you like to learn?” The answer, Beck reports, was often “silence, not a reflective silence, or a contemplative moment, but a weighty silence,” prompting her to wonder “how I might support the recovery of personal truth among my students, to name and interrogate the many ways in which they are diminished in their journey to get here.” She concluded that “I should extend the time to talk about what brought each of us here, to this point and wait for the curriculum.” Here the past migrates into the present and the curriculum becomes revelation.

Despite Canadian commitments to peace, pluralism and multiculturalism, Kathy Bickmore begins, Canadian schools are also shaped by their parent “patriarchal settler state.” That painful paradox preoccupies Bickmore; she has focused her curriculum research on “persistent violence, disproportionately affecting marginalized people.” She wonders how the curriculum might address “violence and social justice conflicts,” thereby enacting those very commitments to peace and pluralism to which Canadians declare allegiance. Such a curriculum of conflict encourages the “continuing expression of difference,” as well as ongoing study of “un-peace.” Bickmore affirms that violence is “*not* inevitable,” that “its underlying conflictual causes can be satisfied, redirected, ended, or mended,” that nonviolence can be taught. She shows that “meaningful peacebuilding education,” while “challenging,” is nonetheless “possible in public schools.”

How? “Peace*building*,” Bickmore explains, “involves multidimensional ongoing efforts” to “transform” the causes of conflict, then “to redress and repair their disproportionate harm to the most vulnerable.” That occurs by “helping students to acquire language, concepts, skills, and relationships for recognizing, communicating, and deliberating about the cultural and social-structural causes and consequences of destructive conflicts, and about what people can do collectively about these problems,” in so doing demonstrating that the school curriculum can support “youths’ development of agency for transformative peacebuilding.” What undermines peacebuilding is that the “curriculum tends to be skewed by the unjust social structures and oppressive cultural beliefs and practices,” often shifting “responsibilities for achieving just peace onto individuals, instead of enabling and inspiring them to probe social-structural, cultural and political factors that constrain as well as enable their agency.” Even so, Bickmore remains “guardedly optimistic” that the curriculum can be converted so that it “*can* help more young people, more of the time, to develop capabilities and motivating relationships for handling complex contemporary justice conflicts,” including economic and racial inequality, the former highlighted

during the COVID-19 pandemic, the latter by the Black Lives Matter and Idle No More movements.

An “aging gender-nonconforming white settler from the south side of Lake Ontario—Haudenosaunee Six Nations Confederacy territory,” Bickmore locates her “intense concern with violence” in her “early life experience,” experience that animates her quest to seek “practicality (so what? now what?) alongside scholarly work.” Bickmore immigrated to Canada 30 years ago, where she developed a “transnational comparative perspective from a new place.” She has conducted “Peace-Building Citizenship Learning research in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Canada ... finding uncanny similarities alongside some differences,” namely that the curriculum-in-use in Canadian, Bangladeshi and Mexican schools included a “range of conflict learning opportunities, from narrow to multi-dimensional,” the most common of which was an “emphasis on negative peace through avoidance or compliance.” While she found curricular inclusion of certain “social diversities” in each nation, “intersecting gendered aspects of conflict and violence were often ignored, especially in Canada.” Moreover, “political conflicts” were often taught only in the “past tense,” in Canada as occurring in “far-away places.” Such a “narrow, symptom-focused conflict avoidance” curriculum, Bickmore concludes, “could *block* development of more democratic and multidimensional forms of democratic agency.” When “multiple dimensions of conflicts and potential peacebuilding action options” are included in the curriculum, when “teachers find ways to listen and to support their self-expression and action roles,” the curriculum can create “space for young people to develop hope and capabilities, to build just peace in their own and others’ lives.”

School science education in Canada,” David Blades begins, “lives under the long shadow cast by the American post-Sputnik reforms of the 1960s.” Referencing the recently revised British Columbia school science curriculum – he was a member of the development team – Blades describes how “we worked *within* the shadows created by the light of this influence.” To this

American science curriculum provinces have, in the past, added “Canadian examples and some reorganization of the order of topics,” amounting to “little to no change in purpose, orientation and topics.” This failure to produce an authentically Canadian science curriculum Blades attributes to “the *agenda* of the curriculum reform,” namely the determination to produce “scientists and technologists to ensure a national advantage in a global economy.”

A “truly Canadian” curriculum, Blades continues, would address “the social and environmental consequences of technological and scientific innovation,” a curriculum not designed to produce “rocket scientists but a science literacy that takes seriously our positioning and responsibility to the survival of other species.” At first Blades thought the Science-Technology-Society-Environment (STSE) initiative might meet this goal, but he quickly concluded that it “still represented an ethos of social engineering.” In 2001 the United States reaffirmed “the direction and intentions of the post-Sputnik reforms in 2001 of a set of science learning standards for science education by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).” In 2012 the U.S. National Research Council published *A Framework for K-12 Science Education: Practices, Crosscutting Concepts, and Core Ideas*, a document that asserted (again) that “science education is of national importance because, the United States’ position in the global economy is declining, in part because U.S. workers lack fundamental knowledge in these fields and so a new curriculum is needed to address the critical issues of U.S. competitiveness.” Blades appreciates that this “new” curriculum conception is “parallel to the post-Sputnik reforms in intention,” in effect extending “the shadow of the post-Sputnik reforms,” now “reset as a fight for economic superiority through the social engineering of science education.” This redirection of Sputnik-era curriculum reform from military to economic ends was “entrenched” when STEM - science, technology, engineering, mathematics – replaced STSE. STEM, Blades appreciates, “reflects and continues the agenda of using school



science for social engineering to reinforce a neoliberal hegemony of superiority in global competition through a focus on a particular set of skills needed for capitalist expansionism.”

The 2016-2019 science curriculum reform undertaken in British Columbia focused on “the idea of an *educated citizen*,” a focus that meant that students studied “science as a human activity.” Those engaged in this reform, Blades continues, were well aware that previous iterations of school science education curriculum had “emphasized science content mastery over the processes of science.” Believing that “learning the processes of science lay at the heart of being an educated citizen,” reformers repositioned “content” as the “means” by which to learn the “processes” of science, a “radical change from any other approach to science education in the world.” The new curriculum continued to emphasize “big ideas in science with content serving as *examples* of these big ideas.” Finally, British Columbia curriculum developers “deliberately provided little detail about content,” encouraging “teachers” to “decide on how to elaborate the content in a way that would help students learn the processes of science.” Moreover, the Ministry encouraged teachers to experiment with “new” forms of assessment appropriate to the reform. “[W]e let go of progress as a single, defined movement,” Blades concludes, enabling teachers and students to “be open to surprise, to creativity and to complexity precisely,” casting the “curriculum as an on-going dialogue with teachers and students without a specific plan for the outcome of the dialogue.” For the moment, it would seem science education in British Columbia has moved outside the shadow of Sputnik, reflecting a specifically Canadian conception of curriculum.

“I recognize that there has been some change,” Susan Dion begins, acknowledging that “many teachers” are “shifting from the perfect stranger to the not so perfect stranger position asking if this has something to do with me, how do I make sense of it, what do I need to know, what am I to do?” In this “post TRC moment” many “well-intentioned folks” are trying “to help,” but the failure of the curriculum to “provide teachers and students with that which they need to engage with

and learn from Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives is ongoing." Dion invokes the concept of "double bind" to depict what "teaching decolonizing and Indigenous content creates ... for both students and teachers." Indigenous students seek not "settler guilt and pity" nor do they wish to be positioned as the "expert" on "Indigeneity," thereby being reduced to an "object of the settler gaze." Nor do settler teachers "want to have their ignorance exposed," or – worse - be "accused of anti-Indigenous racism." Given the double bind in which the present moment positions both Indigenous students and settler teachers, Dion argues for cultivating "awareness of implication."

That awareness means acknowledging that Indigenous students and settler teachers are "differently implicated in colonial structures," requiring settler students and teachers to listen to "Indigenous perspectives," to "work with teachers' resolve to do what is in the best interest of their students and to work with their commitment to having a positive impact." Settler teachers "need to be prepared to feel bad, discomfort, conflict, shame," to acknowledge that "settlers (themselves included) have unearned privileges and it is not equitable or fair." A "curriculum that can cope with these challenges would support Settler Canadians to simultaneously hold that while Canada is a good place for many it was achieved at the expense of Indigenous people." A "Curriculum of Implication needs to be a part of the K-12 program," Dion continues, a curriculum that gives "guidance in how to navigate what it means to be implicated," adding: "While this might feel like a centering the feelings of settlers, identifying and working through emotional response is necessary to create conditions for learning." Such a curriculum will also enable Indigenous students to appreciate that what they don't know – about Indigenous cultures and languages, about the history of cultural genocide in Canada - is "directly tied to colonialism."

Acknowledging her location - Treaty Six Territory - Claudia Eppert sees "skies obscured by wildfire smoke," a human species plagued by pandemic, reminding us that "we are on the brink or in

the midst of the age of the sixth extinction.” What does it mean to conduct curriculum studies “in times of extinction”? Such scholarship becomes a form of witnessing extinction, requiring us “to grapple with the complexities and possibilities of witnessing as an ethical concept,” an “educational imperative of responsivity and responsibility.” Eppert wrestles with witnessing in this era that “challenges temporalities, and re-orient[s] remembrance to intertwinements of past, present, and future.” She mourns creatures murdered as she remembers her own past, now embedded in – “*textured time-with*” – a present plagued by death and the prospect of catastrophes to come. Witnessing, she explains, is at once historical, contemplative, ecological; witnessing is enacted by the human subject, the very presence of whom is now in question. Eppert invokes the Blackfoot concept of *aokakio’ssin* to underscore the significance of attending to what has, what will, happen. This constitutes a curriculum committed to “stay with the trouble rather than look away,” to “look toward the skies.”

Clermont Gauthier is focused on the form of the school, included in which is not only the curriculum but the “sensitive and symbolic configuration of the relationship between the teacher and students. He wonders: “*Does the school form still have its relevance in the contemporary world?*” Digital technology has the “phenomenal power to change, or even dismantle, the school form.” To analyze this threat, Gauthier returns to the “concept of school form,” explicating three of its features: 1) the shaping of knowledge, 2) the transmission of knowledge, and 3) the organization that supports this shaping and transmission. It is these very features that twentieth century pedagogy attempted to “overthrow.” Three utopic visions animated this effort to dissolve the boundary between school-as-institution and life-as-experienced: Thoreau's *Walden or Life in the Woods*, Illich's *Deschooling Society*, and Michel Serres' *Petite Poucette*. It is a boundary now being dissolved as the Internet brings the world outside the school into the school. It is the children of the privileged who enjoy access to this (in Gauthier’s phrasing) *Adamist utopia*. Utopic, however, technology is not; it constitutes a “ubiquitous

... mode of control.” Moreover, in this updated version of Skinner's *Walden II* the teacher is scheduled to disappear, to be replaced by protocol enforced by software. Gauthier dissents, showing how central the teacher has always been, always will be, if only to “*ensure an organized functioning, to ensure order, which is the driving principle of the school form.*” Gauthier explains:

Why is this *order* so fundamental and why does it imply that the space between school and life must be kept separate? If school was life, it would not need to exist, this is what the first utopia reveals. But school doesn't have to be life. It is simply the conscious and articulated recovery of life. The knowledge presented at school simply allows us to understand life, it doesn't have to be life. For its part, digital age does not lead to the disappearance of the school form, on the contrary, it can lead it to its most absolute fulfillment, and to a stern degree.

Gauthier acknowledges that knowledge may now be “everywhere,” but knowledge still “requires someone to select it, interpret it to someone else, make it relevant, criticize it, and organize the conduct of actors to function in the real space or at a distance of the class for instruction and education to happen in a collective of students.” This is the “fundamental *work of the teacher.*”

What the young need to know about sexuality and gender both progressives and conservatives “reduce ... to a knowledge delivery system,” focused on “what to include and exclude, the timing of the delivery, and the most efficient platform for the delivery.” Such instrumentalism ignores the “volatile, capricious, and elusive nature of a sexuality not bound to categories or identities,” resulting in “lists of skills and knowledge” that “arrives too soon and too late, throwing our best laid curricular plans into disarray.” Such a curriculum is predicated on the illusion that “we all know what we are talking about when we talk about sex.” Gilbert's concern is how “formal sex education defends against sexuality, holds it at bay, cordons it off into particular disciplinary boxes, or transforms it into a sanitized list of activities, feelings, and orientations.” Such curriculum can on occasion “both invite students to reflect on their sexual vulnerability and sometimes expose that

vulnerability,” but too often fail “to capture the emotional experience of learning about sexuality.”

She continues:

It is the unique, lived experiences of sex educators animate the field, give it shape and texture; while the official curriculum—in the form of policy documents and guidelines—tries to make order out of the messy abundance. Sex education, and sex educators, ward off the possibility of controversy by constructing an armour of checklists, guidelines, and standards—weary attempts to solder the curriculum to the legitimizing discourses of health, science, and the law.

Even progressive versions of “sex education-as-checklist,” Gilbert points out, “demands compliance.” An emphasis on assessment may prove “politically expedient,” she adds, “but sex education, even the most progressive kind, is not particularly effective.”

Gilbert focuses on a particular progressive argument, namely that “sex education done right saves queer and trans kids’ lives,” a “framing of sex education as necessary for the health and well-being of LGBTQ youth [that] comes at a cost.” That cost is a narrowing of “identificatory possibilities for LGBTQ youth,” explaining that if “progressive sex education invokes depressed, suicidal queer and trans youth as an alibi for promoting an inclusive curriculum, then teachers and students may come to understand queer and trans sexualities and genders as, in large part, sources of risk and danger.” Moreover, LGBTQ+ youth “regularly resist their recruitment into the tropes of either victim or resilient hero.” Reports of queer and trans lives during the Covid-19 lockdown contradict framings of LGBTQ+ students as “at heightened risk of poor mental health outcomes.” Like other students, LGBTQ+ students missed being physically present with their friends and teachers, but they also rediscovered – even reconstructed – themselves during lockdown. “A queer curriculum practice,” Gilbert concludes, “sees the messiness of sexuality and gender as itself a place of learning, not something that could be cleaned up through a revised set of guidelines.”

Jocelyn Létourneau asks: “How do nations – these imaginary communities associated with physical spaces and instituted structures – (re)produce themselves *also* by forging and spreading a historical narrative? How is this historical narrative internalized by ‘ordinary people’ who, in so doing, (un)consciously ‘nationalize’ themselves into matrices of meaning in which their individuality and identity are combined with the reality of a community inscribed over time?” Létourneau reports that “the young students I queried” all knew quite a lot about Québec history, if a “hodgepodge of statements of all kinds, factual or idealistic, gleaned here and there.” He summarizes: “For Francophones, this narrative structure pivots around the following key idea: ‘We were had by the Other, who prevented us from accomplishing what we otherwise would have, which led our history into a trajectory of resistance and our collective existence into an experience of powerlessness and bare survival.’” Anglophones tend not to share this narrative as they incorporate Québec’s history into the broader history of Canada; then “they insist on the need to recognize the diverse and pluralistic face of Québec society over time.” They substitute Indigenous peoples for Francophones as the “true victims of History, the only truly oppressed people in Canada.”

Embedded in its own historical narrative, Létourneau continues, each nation has its “own historical *problematic*,” a “meta-representation” that conveys a “grand narrative of the Self through which entities grasp themselves as or assemble themselves into a whole and then consolidate and mythistoricize their trajectory through time.” For Québec and French Canada generally, this problematic is “Duality and Victimhood.” For English Canada, it is “Diversity and Peace.” Each problematic reduces the multiplicity of the past into “something unequivocal, clear, simple and above all meaningful.” The problematic all Canadians share is that all non-Indigenous peoples have “benefited from colonialism,” creating for Létourneau a “double bind,” given that his “faith in education not to resolve but to contribute to creating the conditions necessary for new and better relationships between Indigenous people and settler Canadians exists alongside my knowledge of the

ongoing lack of significant progress.” Despite this “double bind I continue to have faith that our combined work is making it possible for more settler teachers to turn toward Indigenous students.” That faith – that curricular turn – constitutes Canada as “more of an open question than a conclusive answer, more of a sum of provisional arrangements than a definitive program, more of an unfinished composition than a completed score.”

David Lewkovich is also wrestling with a “double bind,” as he wonders what it would mean to “slow” the “forward movement” of teacher education – a field focused on the future – and turn to “dilatatory, digressive spaces [that] may invite future teachers to play with speculative forms of articulation,” to release “what may otherwise remain unexpressed.” He has found that comics and graphic novels “appear to use methods of interpretive uncertainty as a means of amplifying the different kinds of readings that readers may pursue.” In teacher education, “governing what can and cannot be talked about, what is and is not thinkable – is often maintained at the expense of the kinds of curiosity that distraction, dilatoriness, and dreaming inevitably encourage.” Lewkovich asks: “What if, we may add – on the subjects of narrative, desire, and pleasure – education becomes a place to explore the uncertain detours of the middle, rather than a predetermined requirement to shut such exploration down?” Truth is, he continues, educational experience as lived is “unavoidably indeterminate and inconclusive,” often “prone to revision, and despite the teacher’s best efforts, sometimes never experienced at all.” He suggests that “learning to linger in the dilatatory may be seen as an important way for preservice teachers to reckon with the emotional challenges of education itself,” prompting “alternative forms of speculative articulation.” To remind prospective teachers that “adolescence and all it represents is not just something that exists in other people, I often ask my students to engage in autobiographical work that helps to reacquaint them with the emotional qualities of these years, while also recognizing that, as a series of psychic relations, adolescence never actually disappears.” He also asks them to tell stories and to then illustrate them, as “the minor

details that students use in their comics” nonetheless disclose students’ “current concerns, fears, and desires as preservice teachers.”

Lewkovich posits adolescence and teacher education as “non-places” wherein lived experience occurs in “close relation to a different world (adulthood and the classroom, respectively) that is simultaneously ultra-real and theoretical.” He asks students to compose “literary non-places,” what he thinks of as “synthetic experiments that slow the forward movement of learning down, focusing less on teleological, satisfactory conclusions, than on what is speculative, fragmentary, and incomplete.” Both “reading and comics creation appear to encourage middling as a verb,” enabling prospective teachers to “explore the defenses and anxieties of being in a place where knowledge, both of self and others, is not always secure and dependable.” Such assignments constitute “a preparation for classroom life ... insert[ing] an element of wonder in teacher education,” anticipating processes of “knowledge creation and sense making in schools.” Such teacher education allows prospective teachers “to touch what is more transient and elusive about the inner worlds of teachers and students.” Lewkovich concludes: “Teaching with the middle is thus equivalent to teaching with and through mystery – excessive, everchanging, persistent, invisible, unavoidable, and if we can bear being honest about not knowing, an important part of what seems to make us human.”

Nicholas Ng-A-Fook provides seven narrative snapshots of curriculum in motion, in time, in place, “struggling while running, to find a pace, one’s place, as an uninvited guest along the shores of the Kichi Zibi, on the unceded and unsundered traditional territories of the Anishnàbeg.” Simultaneously literal and symbolic, curriculum constitutes “a confluence of turbulent temporal movements, reactivating, reconstructing, juxtaposing, and restorying (restoring) a subject, subjected, in this chapter, and at this situated moment, to ‘life writing,’ ‘settler colonialism,’ ‘truth, and then ‘reconciliation’.” Each of these topics and tempos appear in each narrative snapshot, including one



of his teaching of *EDU 6102: Curriculum Studies Seminar* focused on the “isness” of curriculum studies. Each also appears in the other snapshots: *Life Writing Research as Currere*, *Reactivating Settler Colonial Dominions Toward Re/Making an End*, *A Canadian Curriculum Theory Project*, *Changing Courses*, *a Coursing, in Relation to Global Pandemic*, *Podcasting A Canadian Curriculum Theory Project*, and *Reconstructing Curriculum Studies in Canada*.

Through these snapshots Ng-A-Fook invokes key concepts, crucial issues, crushing events, political movements, among them the school-to-prison pipeline, climate crisis, settler colonialism, the ethics of care, treaty education, consciousness, psychic integration, revolt, reparation, genocide, assimilation, tolerance, terror management theory, fetishizing fear, colonial racisms, commemorative monuments, homelessness, empathy, new materialism, Elders’ teachings, curriculum policy reforms, Black feminist autobiographical research and living curriculum as nonviolence. Never mind all this during four waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. “Reconstructing curriculum studies,” Ng-A-Fook concludes, “calls on us to reactivate and reconstruct our imagination ... calls on us to continue troubling and re/making the grammar of settler colonialism,” and in so doing, discovering the “isness” of curriculum studies in Canada.

Emphasizing education as “ethico-political,” Pacini-Ketchabaw seeks to “redress the instrumentalization of early childhood curriculum at a time when neoliberalism organizes most relations within the field.” She theorizes “early education as a possibility for transforming the status quo, for invention of otherwise worlds, for reconfiguration of what humanity might become.” To do so, she returned to her past, no “individual journey” she insists: “I have not/do not walk alone.” Arranging her autobiographical reflections performatively, Pacini-Ketchabaw begins with Act 1, titled “Pedagogical commitments at a Time of Ecological Catastrophe,” recalling her work this past decade with colleagues in the Common Worlds Research Collective, a collective committed to enabling “early childhood educators and young children to respond to the climate catastrophe.” In

Act 2, titled “An Education in the Midst of the Horrors of State Dictatorship,” Pacini-Ketchabaw returns to her own early education, which took place during dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). “Becoming a teacher and an early childhood educator following a brutal dictatorship,” she tells us, “meant that I was exposed to the strong movement towards community participation and democratization that pervaded education at that time.” In Act 3 – “Migration and Engagements with Multicultural Education” – Pacini-Ketchabaw recalls her migration to Canada where she was introduced to a “different mode of neoliberal education,” although “not the blatant authoritarian education that I had encountered during my childhood.” In Act 4 – “A Curriculum Framework within the Grasps of Neoliberalism” – she recalls her participation, along with other early childhood colleagues, in the development of the “first British Columbia early learning curriculum framework,” and recently, in its revision.

This curriculum revision ignores developmentalism and embraces “post foundational theories,” even incorporating concepts with which Pacini-Ketchabaw and her colleagues in the Common Worlds research collective have been working for the last 10 years. “Despite efforts to promote early education as an ethico-political activity,” she judges, “early childhood centres and other educational institutions continue to prioritise workforce supply for economic growth. Humanist-inspired projects to achieve social justice and freedom have been hijacked by economic development and productivity agendas. Capitalist extraction, production, and consumption continue to be associated with human ‘progress and development’.” Just as progressive ideas were hijacked by Fascists one-hundred years ago,<sup>9</sup> “Common Worlds Pedagogies” have also been usurped to “maintain the status quo ... not simply misunderstood, but are quickly appropriated with neoliberal aims.”

“We compose ourselves and this piece as settlers in a colonial state,” Jackie Seidel and her colleagues begin, naming the place where “we learn together in *Mob’kins’tsis*,” the place “where the

snow-melt and glacier-fed Bow and Elbow Rivers converge, the place where Treaty 7 was signed in 1877,” now known as Calgary. “We commit ourselves to learning about the ongoing colonial history of Canada,” Seidel and her colleagues continue, citing their 2019-2020 participation – “as teachers” – in the Fridays for Future youth climate strike movement. Their confrontation of “climate change denialism, racism, and misogyny” acknowledges that curriculum is “deeply and historically entangled and implicated in a cultural system that now portends an existential and catastrophic threat to life itself.” They document this activism with eight autobiographical pieces that were prompted by three questions: “*What are we learning from participating in the strikes? What does it mean to be a teacher in this time and place? What are our pedagogical responsibilities to children and the future?*” The climate crisis requires “acting in every way possible, as fast as possible” to provide the young with a livable future, an inhabitable planet: “We strike for all children in the present, for all future generations, and all future time.”

Striking for the future means remembering the past, including that present prosperity – so unequally distributed – is extracted from the exploitation of others: human, non-human, planetary. Remembering the past makes the present intelligible, including the life-threatening impacts of that prosperity upon those who have contributed little to the climate crisis. Seidel and her colleagues’ participation in strikes – their collaboration in the composition of this essay – “signal our commitments to Indigenous-settler reconciliation and decolonization, to moving forward in a good way.” Additionally,” our participation signals our commitment to ways of learning and being together that create livable and socially-just futures including for our more-than-human kin.”

Teresa Strong-Wilson is focused on “disquiet.” She returns to a school where she herself had been a student, a school she had not seen in decades, a “disquieting return” as she observes the effects of a teacher’s words on students, leaving Strong-Wilson wondering about “the potential violence *of* our words and actions, as teachers.” She understands that: “Teaching is not always a

rational discourse; in fact, there is much going on that lies on and below the surface of what is said and is not said or more appositely, felt.” Returning to her former school, to the reprimand she witnessed the teacher issue there, Strong-Wilson writes:

I remember how shocked I felt when I heard the first reprimand to the class, which was on the occasion of my first visit, when I was, again ironically, sitting at the teacher’s desk. For it was as if I was an elementary student again. I did not identify with her frustration as a teacher. Instead, I felt small and insignificant, powerless to escape from this room that suddenly had all of the air sucked out of it and where all my fibers were telling me to run, fast.

The event reminds Strong-Wilson that in her own teaching “at a certain point, I stopped trying to be loved by students,” focusing instead “on my love of the subject,” teaching so that they could “move them towards what was harder, of their own accord.” Then, she noticed that “students began to love me then, when there were no expectations on my part that they would.”

Strong-Wilson fastens less onto “foreshadowing” then on “backshadowing” and, especially, “sideshadowing,” this last idea “allow[ing] for grasping what did happen ... along with what else might have happened, thus unsettling the *present* time.” (This idea reminds me of the concept of “collateral damage,” except “sideshadowing” is more comprehensive and includes events one welcomes.) Sideshadowing, Strong-Wilson continues, allows us to attend the “significance” of the present moment, its “alternatives,” what it spawns, “thus giving the lie to any ‘single story’,” fixing “our attention back to contiguity: the placing of a teacher and her students in relation to myself and my claims about myself, herself in relation to her own self and stories, myself in relation to the place where I grew up and the school that I attended as an elementary student, each of us in relation to the counter-stories.” And “perhaps most importantly of all, sideshadowing restores to time its processual possibilities, in which choices are ongoing and recursive rather than fixed and

unalterable.” To avoid foreclosure “on time, and especially on another’s time, whose time is their own,” Strong Wilson wants to “remain open to what can still happen, even as I have hope in the teacher’s preoccupation, her furor,” an “internal vortex” that “makes time speed up and confrontation inevitable: with counter-stories, with students and, one hopes, with oneself as teacher.”

## Conclusion

Leslie Armour construes “national culture” as “both binding us together” and “recognizing the discreteness of our various communities,” adding that “through literature and art we can build a world which we can share.”<sup>10</sup> If one substitutes “curriculum studies” for “binding us together” and “present preoccupations” for “various communities” in Armour’s first phrase, and “scholarship” for “literature and art” in the second, the character of this collection becomes clarified. Knowledge of most worth is that we can enlist to address the pressing issues of the day; it both binds us together and acknowledges the “discreteness” of what preoccupies us: climate crisis, planetary degradation, species extinction, cultural genocide, conflict, sexuality, truth and reconciliation.

“National culture” – in a conceptual as well as anthropological sense – reminds that curriculum studies, while worldwide, is nationally configured, often around national curriculum reforms. Because that is not the case Canada, the field seems somewhat severed from provincial ministries of education, more tethered to teacher education, prompting Anne Phelan to explicate their “complicating conjunctions.”<sup>11</sup> And however focused on the future, as David Lewovich points out, teacher education is structured by its practically-inflected past, a fact Teresa Strong-Wilson’s essay emphasizes, if differently. That past is multivariate, multinational, and embodied in specific persons, as Kumari Beck, Kathy Bickmore, and Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw testify. Haunted by the past we all are, as Blades, Dion, Gauthier, and Létourneau explain (again, if differently). Québécois

and Anglophones, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike grapple with the temporal dynamics of culture and community: discovering the past, understanding the present, finding the future. Teaching truth toward reconciliation – however Sisyphean that professional obligation seems – constitutes (in Strathausen’s phrasing) the “dynamics” our “discursive practices” create, the “law” of “structural development” the field follows. That truth is knowledge of most worth – knowing that sexuality, like national identity, remains an existential project with which not only the young struggle (as Gilbert appreciates) – a truth entrusted to teachers and scholars who face the challenges of communicating it, complicating conversation not only in classrooms but within the field itself.

What we have here is a photograph, a still shot of a field very much in motion, essays that provide answers to Nicholas Ng-A-Fook’s reverberating question. Where “we are at” in a literal sense is on the unceded, ancestral, traditional lands of Indigenous Peoples, a fact to be acknowledged and its history taught. Susan Dion’s essay may be the only one in this collection focused exclusively on this pivotal curriculum issue, but you’ll note that other scholars locate themselves on the First Peoples’ lands. While threatening – due to its frequency – to become an empty ritual, the land acknowledgement acknowledges the ongoing clash of cultures. “When we acknowledge that UBC is located on the ‘unceded, ancestral territory of the Musqueam people,’ Rocha writes,

the reality of “unceded, ancestral territory” can be understood in more than one way. In the most immediate sense this is a political statement of non-surrender. Concretely, this means that we are not gathered on the Crown Lands; there is no colonial sovereign in possession of this territory. But this can also, on my understanding, be understood as a spiritual statement of non-surrender. We are not gathered on soulless, inanimate ground; there is no modern scientific sovereignty over the metaphysical reality of this place. Unceded, ancestral territory, in this sense of spiritual resistance, is another way to say that the land is always-already

sacred and it will never be surrendered to a worldview where nothing is sacred. The demand is not for tolerance or respect; sacred land demands *reverence*. We must know how to worship.<sup>12</sup>

Witnessing may not be worship, but it a “discursive practice” that implies reverence for what has been lost in this era of extinction of species human and non-human. Witnessing means mourning – as Claudia Eppert testifies – but it also implies outrage, as Seidel and her colleagues make clear.

What is being lost now is life itself, an extinction accompanied – caused? – by a pervasive, predatory, and intensifying technologization that disables humanity from confronting our profane present. As the planet becomes less habitable, the rich devise escapes into “outer space” while the rest of us – if our economic circumstances allow - escape to the Cloud, that virtual also termed “alternative” reality to which many migrate now. Not the actual migration – “experience that is at once traumatic and liberating”<sup>13</sup> - from one place to another to which several scholars testify in this collection. Not present in place – a political, cultural, sacred specificity as Rocha asserts – we become lost in space, i.e. no place in particular. Witnessing to this elusive unreal present might be what curriculum studies scholars share in common, not the first time that scholars have been bonded by what they cannot abide or may not survive. “When we consider the fellowship of intellectuals associated with the Frankfurt School,” Gordon reminds, “we cannot ignore their shared experience of exile,” that “the critical theorists of the first generation were united by trauma.”<sup>14</sup> While we too face fascism, our emergency is epitomized by the Covid-19 pandemic, at once a deadly disease and a metaphor for the plague destroying humanity. Testifying to these facts while teaching toward a time afterward remains our resolve.

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#### Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Curriculum Studies in Canada: Present Preoccupations*, edited by Anne M. Phelan and William F. Pinar, University of Toronto Press, in press.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all quoted passages can be found in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> 2014, 14

<sup>4</sup> Strathausen 2017, 293.

<sup>5</sup> Strathausen 2017, 301.

<sup>6</sup> Gershon 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Pinar 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Shuchat-Shaw 1980.

<sup>9</sup> McGlazer 2020, 3.

<sup>10</sup> 1981, 141.

<sup>11</sup> 2015.

<sup>12</sup> 2020, 144.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon 2020, 110.

<sup>14</sup> 2020, 104.