



Next Acts:

Educational Impasse, Events and a One-Legged Magpie

A Resource to Support Curriculum Inquiry and Educational Development

Kent den Heyer

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Contents

- 1 Foreword
- 3 Preface
- 5 Acknowledgement
- 6 Introduction
- 8 A Thinking Education: Who Might We Become Through Our Study Together?
- 14 The Unthinking Terror of “The One”
- 17 Lane Muses
- 18 Who Are We?
- 24 Lost Aim: Socrates in Post-Truth Times
- 31 Doing Better Than Just Falling Forward: Supporting Education by Linking Subject Matters With Futures Thinking
- 39 Alberta’s New Story—More Than a Better Version of Yesterday
- 42 References

Foreword

This engaging publication is certainly worth reading carefully and more than once. It is such a welcome addition to the literature on curriculum and its place in educational development. A thinking education (as one chapter title here) resonates in every chapter, but the various thought pieces also present different perspectives that help us to clarify at least some of the essence of education.

Indeed, there lies the main value of the collection for practitioners and researchers alike. Its exploration goes right to the heart of what curriculum inquiry and education in general should or might be about. It helps us both to think about education and to appreciate the central role thinking must have in education. The publication also manages, in a powerful way, to ground the discussion in the present, to look seriously to the future, which the current educational discourse rarely manages to do in a meaningful way, and then to harness some of the treasures of our centuries-old classic educational discourse.

Generally there is little disagreement that education is at the core of what a society has to do in order to develop itself as a vibrant, harmonious whole; education is definitely among its most important and valued tasks. This is shown by the political emphasis very often attached to educational issues, also by the public discourse and by thousands of academic and professional journals dedicated to education worldwide.

Most of the current educational discourse is about practically everything imaginable related to education—except what is most important. We may discuss how to educate teachers; who should run the schools; if there should be a school choice; what role central or municipal authorities should play, for example, in setting the curriculum; what should be tested on a local basis and for what purpose; and who should be in charge of those tests. We discuss if we should have international comparisons, like the PISA tests; if we should digitize more or even most of our education; if we should bring the powerful educational providers into the schools, like Apple or IBM; and, of course, how we should teach math or science. We also discuss how to ensure quality in schools, or best practices or what works in education. This last sentence shows, if indirectly, the glaring omission in much of the educational discourse. Because what is most often forgotten to address is, What is the purpose of school?

Addressing the fundamental question, What gives education high quality, that is, what is the most valuable combination of content and interaction in the school? is precisely the essence of Kent den Heyer's selection of essays. It must be both of interest and of concern to everybody within the field of education why this crucial part of the educational discourse is so often missing. Having had the privilege to participate in extensive European discussion on education, among both teachers and academics, with particular focus on the Nordic countries, having also attended uLead several times and worked with the union in my own country, I find the universality of the challenges and issues raised, whoever is talking, incredibly generic. In particular, I find, when talking to teachers, that they are deeply interested in the perspective raised in these essays. But, perhaps they don't talk about them much despite their interests.

For those interested in diving deep into the purposes of education and the implications for curriculum development, I am convinced that the accessible and compelling discussion in these chapters can help teachers to develop their own voice on these matters and give them, that is, both teachers and the topics, the place they deserve in the educational discourse and development.

Jón Torfi Jonasson

Jón Torfi Jonasson became professor of education at the University of Iceland in 1993 and was dean of the Faculty of Social Science, 1995–2001. In 2008 he became the dean of the School of Education when it was merged with the University of Iceland. In recent years he has studied the problem of dropouts in Iceland but has also written on all levels of education. Currently he is participating in JustEd, the Nordic Centre of Excellence, and cooperating closely with the Council of Europe, Pestalozzi Programme. He has been a frequent contributor to Association publications and a presenter at uLead.

Preface

What If Curriculum (of a Certain Kind) Doesn't Matter?

“Curriculum transformation”—more recently reframed as curriculum redesign—has been long promised and little seen in Alberta. As a longstanding University of Alberta education faculty representative on the Alberta Teachers’ Association provincial Curriculum Committee, I have seen the waves of government officials update the profession about their initiatives to actualize this transformation.

The current efforts to reshape curriculum began in 2010 with the Ministry of Education’s publication of *Inspiring Education*. This document summarized Minister Hancock’s fruitful engagement with citizens about what changes Albertans desired for their schools. The document highlighted the usual concerns, hopes and platitudes offered by diverse participants. The direction for curriculum change had been, however, already set. As already detailed in the document, Hancock had directed his officials to launch a competency-focused cross-disciplinary approach to curriculum to prepare children for the future.

Calls for and programs of competency-based education have been made in the past. Yet systemic challenges that limit students’ ability to express their learning remain unaddressed—outdated standardized provincial tests, the province’s large classroom sizes, and the lack of resources to address the psychosocial needs of young people. The current government has taken some steps toward acknowledging and offering some monies to address the latter two concerns. However, the idea that curriculum transformation could occur without fundamental changes to large-scale standardized assessments and the outdated approach to accountability is troubling.

Publicly, few ministry officials acknowledge the fact that teachers will, regardless of what program of studies is in place, continue to be pressured to teach to those standardized tests by which their effectiveness as teachers and their schools’ effectiveness will be evaluated. Regardless of what program is in place, standardization measures how closely teachers let nothing interesting or implicative happen for students in classrooms. Or, should something interesting happen, the standardization regime stifles public dissemination of what such a vivifying education might look like.

Standardized tests have little to do with measuring what students know. They also offer little meaningful information about what students can do with their learning, other than ensuring that students will, after writing the tests, dump their study notes into the proper recycle container as responsible citizens. The more standardized the evaluation of student learning, the lower the standards by which the public and teachers hold each other accountable for what students can do and show with their learning.

The current government’s aspirations for educational transformation does not acknowledge a question anyone familiar with the international research into curriculum change and classroom practices would ask: What if curriculum (of a certain kind) doesn’t matter for improving teaching and learning in classrooms? This question is not new, as Dewey (2001, 388) noted some 115 years ago:

And, by the time [the progressive's] ideals and theories had been translated over into their working equivalents in the curriculum, the difference between them and what he as a conservative really wished and practiced became often the simple difference of tweedle dum from tweedle dee.

As I detail elsewhere (den Heyer 2009), curriculum historian Ian Westbury (2008, 52) offers a synoptic review of research indicating that curriculum reformers often fail because they thought “curriculum making was an educational project—that is, an activity and process directed at the improvement or enhancement of schooling.” Such an assumption indicates that these reformers do “not . . . understand curricula, curriculum making, and curriculum policy making realistically” (Westbury 2008, 52). And about what are these negotiations “realistically” concerned? As Westbury concludes, in the “social context” (in contrast to the “instructional” or “programmatic” context) “the debates themselves and their resolutions yield frameworks for narratives about the role education and schooling as ideas play in a social and cultural order” (p 49).

Citing Placier, Walker and Foster, Michael Apple (2008, 28) also asserts that the establishments of standards in curricula “are unlikely to fulfill their proponents’ intentions. Rather they are often symbolic accomplishments.” As he summarizes, “[u]ltimately, the standards became a form of symbolic politics, signaling that something was being done but having little transformative potential” (p 28). In short, curriculum “change” constitutes a status quo construct to appear innovative, while working to block any real change:

[Curriculum making] is a mechanism, or tool, deployed to manage the political, professional, and public fields around schooling, more often than not designed to mute rather than amplify calls for educational reform and change. (Westbury 2008, 61)

Now, nine years into this process of curriculum transformation, little has been accomplished or reformed, though much energy expended. As the platitude has it, “culture trumps policy.” Culture, however, is not static.

Examining the position of curriculum in a thinking education, this work invites readers to focus on the school and classroom culture that we create when we share with students those ideas needed to explore socially preferable future outcomes. The hope animating this work is that in doing so we might better actualize schooling ideals about both subject-specific understandings and broader citizenship aims.

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Acknowledgement

This publication offers both an invitation and a provocation to anyone interested in the promise of positive curriculum change here in Alberta and, indeed, globally. Professor Kent den Heyer's international reputation as a scholar stands alongside his advocacy for and commitment to the leadership of teachers in curriculum development and renewal. Evidence of this includes his numerous publications in the field of curriculum change and leadership, as well as his ten years of service on the Alberta Teachers' Association's Curriculum Committee.

Next Acts: Educational Impasse, Events and a One-Legged Magpie is an important resource for several reasons. It represents a compilation of den Heyer's work that has informed the work of schools and researchers involved in the Association's Great School for All international school partnership program. One of the international research partners, Jón Torfi Jonasson, professor emeritus University of Iceland, sums it up best when he invites readers of this collection to move past many of the current fashionable concerns over "21st-century competencies" and protracted debates about content specifications. In his foreword, he calls upon us to engage communities and ourselves in "diving deep into the purposes of education."

The collection ranges from reflections on the purposes of education to critiques of the growing reliance on standardized testing as a path to reform. The publication also offers an alternative narrative to a currently accepted view that curriculum resides in the detailed prescriptions of government documents and committees, rather than what he calls "a thinking education," in which the curriculum lives in the encounter between teacher, student and the object of inquiry.

This publication invites teachers—both as individuals and as groups—to take up the leadership work ahead of curriculum making (which could be one such encounter for the profession).

*J-C Couture
Associate Coordinator Research*

Introduction

Quanta Viable

Evaporation, condensation, drips and drops

Between stars and I drips drop dreams

Potential begets being in supreme possibility

virtual almos, spaces that scream

into newborn nexus points

our interstellar dreams

Schools are too often places where teachers convey answers to questions students are rarely, if ever, asked. For example, looking back over my K–12 education, I now realize that what I was being taught was an answer to questions, among others, like “Who do some people think we are as a country?” and “What is it to live well?” However, we students were rarely asked to explicitly connect what we were learning in school to these important questions.

Of course we were asked questions—those on tests, those rhetorical, those accusatory. We just were rarely asked the kind of question that sparked any intellectual or spiritual capacity as open inquiries into the “wicked problems” of our shared lives (Rittel and Webber 1973).

I do not think my experience is unique. Only with advanced studies, if lucky, are students introduced to the questions, controversies and mysteries that constitute each discipline and that make them worthwhile humanizing activities in which to engage. As a young teacher, I taught the way I had been taught and continued conveying answers to implicit questions to which schools and disciplines are particular responses. Let me share a moment when that changed for me.

I once taught a Grade 12 advanced placement European history course. In my mind, I offered a rich course based on multiple perspectives (eg, Marxist, liberal, postcolonial) of how we might interpret the historical content covered. I hoped that my students would leave the course appreciating the many lenses available to approximate past and present realities to inform possible futures. I dedicated the final two days of the history course to the question of whether, based on our study together, there was reason for hope as we face collective challenges of economic inequity and environmental degradation among others.

One student in that class, Bernardo, brought an insatiable appetite to the study of history. He was the type of eager student who makes teachers happy. I was struck, however, by Bernardo’s pessimism during our final two classes.

After our last class, Bernardo came to thank me again for the course and to wish me well. I thanked him for his eager interest in the course. I then asked whether I had a correct impression of his pessimism. “Yes,” he said. I inquired as to the cause. He replied, “Because history proves that humans are short-sighted, greedy and violent.” With that, he left for the summer and I was left shattered.

Imagine a mirror reflecting back an image. Until that moment, the image I saw of myself reflected what I thought I looked to be as a teacher. Pointing at the mirror, I might have said, “It is that that I am. Quite fine!” Bernardo’s words were a jagged brick thrown at that mirror image.

After Bernardo left to go join graduate celebrations, I sat at my desk and wept. What I thought about my teaching and myself as a teacher committed to a possibility that education could contribute to a more just world shattered before me. This was an “event” (Badiou 2001). This

event was both an end of an illusion and the beginning of others. My work as a teacher and scholar is largely a response to the question, What will this event have meant?

Working through illusions of self, of others and of what we believe we are doing is not an individual trip. Rather, it involves all we meet once seized with the necessity to figure “it” out or to think better once some easy explanations no longer make any sense. This requires the thoughts and support of others to muster the courage to continue to learn in the face of shattered images, the nexus between what was and what will become.

As the French thinker Alain Badiou (2001, 78) details, encountering such an event, we are confronted with the question and task of “fidelity,” where, for Badiou, *the* question of ethics (and, I argue, the educational) begins: “A crisis of fidelity is always what puts to the test, following the collapse of an image, the sole maxim of consistency (and thus ethics): Keep going!”

Teaching at that time, I did not know how to address assumptions that my students and I unknowingly conveyed to each other because I did not think about what question(s) my course implicitly helped students to address. Thus, despite my best efforts to show otherwise, Bernardo interpreted the history taught in school (and outside) to not only be *the* human story, but also one from which he could make sweeping conclusions about human nature and our future. For Bernardo, none of this was a source of hope. For me, I returned to graduate school to think through the gaping void between what I thought I was doing and what actually I came to see as getting done. It has been a long trip.

This collection gathers a set of work in response to my Bernardo event, including some new pieces and others rewritten from articles published in research journals and professional magazines. The chapters range across topics taken up elsewhere in more detail, but they have an advantage of being more concise. I arranged the chapters so that one or another may be shared without the burden of having to read them all. Of necessity, therefore, some points are repeated across several chapters, such as the distinction between sophist and Socratic forms of education. Authors such as Hannah Arendt, Alain Badiou and Gert Biesta reappear as touchstones throughout. This is appropriate. Arendt and Badiou have led me into long nights of thought in response to my Bernardo event, and Biesta, building off a range of important educational thinkers, offers important distinctions we teachers and students need to think about more today.

At the core, I write about curriculum, which is the map we design and hope to travel with students “filled with the stories we tell our youth” (D Donald nd, personal communication). A program of studies has some import. But the affirmative inventive capacities of being well with each other is found when we arrive at the end of the plan, the edges, “where there be monsters.”

I end here with advice I attribute to US education scholar William Ayers: “Don’t let your daily teaching make a mockery of your teaching ideals.” To students, take the risk to learn from how and what you are being taught, for good or ill.

There is always only one question in the ethic of truths: how will I, as someone, continue to exceed my own being? How will I link the things I know, in a consistent fashion, via the effects of being seized by the not-known?

(Badiou 2001, 50)

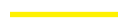
A Thinking Education: Who Might We Become Through Our Study Together?

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Thank you for the invitation to be with you today.¹ I am honoured. I see that the title of today's gathering is "Thinking Education." I want to title my talk "A Thinking Education" and identify questions that might address impediments to a thinking education in the very way we now think about education. First, let me share with you an event that put me on my way to thinking about a thinking education.

" Look, when I was in school I just wanted to know what I needed to know. I didn't want to have to think about it."

—Student



Years ago, I was teaching a senior education class with 30 bright students who were soon-to-be teachers. At that time, I had this notion of dangerous teaching. This was an approach to teaching based on the assertion that what we need in schools is not more or so-called new or innovative content, but another kind of self-knowledge that might emerge when we challenge the curricular knowledge students and teachers already possess and bring to their encounter with each other (ie, curriculum as encounter) (den Heyer 2008). In that particular class, I laid out my argument (connected to the readings for the day) and stopped to ask the class, "So, might you one day be dangerous teachers?" One particularly bright student who had shared in earlier classes that she had a very successful high school career and had won scholarships to the university finally spoke, "Look, when I was in school I just wanted to know what I needed to know. I didn't want to have to think about it."

Several of her classmates started giggling at the comment, but I said, "This is an insightful comment about schooling; let's follow this up." So I asked, "What do you see as the difference between knowing and thinking?" Frowning and getting frustrated, she replied, "Yes, but if we have students think all day, when will we get anything done?" Here was an articulate senior education student who helped the class get to a core insight regarding the lived differences between schooling and education and between getting things done and thinking.²

This student's insights have led me to ask a few questions that I want to share with you in support of a thinking education.

If the time of teaching is not always the time of learning, how might we design assessments as the opportunity for students to take pride in their work?

In what ways might we teachers open up our teaching so that what students may think about extends beyond the near horizon of what we can reasonably claim to know?

1. A version of this section was originally presented as an address to the Graduate Students' Research Forum, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta (March 12, 2016).

2. I am also curious as to what you think that student referred when she said we would not be able to get "anything done" if teachers had students think all day.

Finally, what is educational about education that is distinct from schooling’s qualification and socialization rationales, evident in whatever past or contemporary State in the world you care to examine (Biesta and Safstrom 2011)?

I will address this final question here but also hope to spark some thought about the other two.

Biesta (2010) notes that the public in the Euro-American tradition expects teachers and schools to work with students toward two distinct but interrelated aims, qualification and socialization. The public expects schools to qualify students for public-private competency, ranging from acquiring numeracy and literacy to specific training for a particular skill to the habits useful for future employment (eg, arriving punctually for class or work). Qualification thus tends to link the schooling system to economic justifications for public funding. A second and overlapping function, socialization, involves initiating students into existing dominant orders of thought and comportment ranging from ways of speaking and behaving to disciplinary ways of knowing that are held by some to be necessary for effective citizenship (eg, thinking like a historian or scientist). Such initiation can be judged as positive or negative, intentional or unintentional, depending on who does the judging. Beyond these two expectations for schooling everywhere and through time, I think, however, that we need to ask, “What is educational about education?” For me, this is a crucial question and one most of us have left behind in our journey to the present given the impediments we face today thinking about the educational.

Impediments to a Thinking Education

The Neoliberal Drive to Prepare Kids for Life Rather Than Prepare Kids for the World

Arendt’s ([1958] 1998) distinction between life and world is important here. For *life*, schooling focuses on job readiness and the animal business of maintaining our biological life rather than the *world* shared among and between humans and in need of continual repair through our attentive presence. This is the difference between what Arendt calls *labour*—what we need to do to maintain our animal lives, such as planting or buying food—and *work*—what we do to build shared lives as humans (a *world*), such as trading, setting up schools and hospitals—and between *work* and *action*.

By *action*, Arendt refers to that interaction between people talking about a pressing political question. Action involves people doing what is unexpected: interrupting their routine and private activities to engage in discourse, and, through doing so, creating a place where a public can form. But it is not creating a place (the product of work) that counts as action. It is, however, only in this place that agents can continuously rearticulate their thoughts as actions in conjunction with the thoughts of others that constitute the political realm. In doing so, we potentially become more than what we have been socialized to believe about ourselves: “Our freedom and subjectivity are therefore not to be found outside of the web of plurality; they only exist within it” (Biesta 2010, 84–85). Further, it is through this potential freedom, only available

“ Our freedom and subjectivity are therefore not to be found outside of the web of plurality; they only exist within it.”

(Biesta 2010, 84–85)

through a public sphere, that those who believe all should be reduced to an economic metric found abhorrent. The story they believe says that all that is public should be private, that the political should be reduced to a controlled set of individual consumer choices and that the good life is itself a private affair.

Where this story reigns, we have become individual nodes in a global circuitry of neoliberal imaginaries and screens onto which commercially mediated messages project (eg, advertisements on your Facebook based on your recent Google search queries). Socially, formerly blank places on private capital's map (including the Internet itself) have now been commercialized, from hockey rink boards in the late 1980s to today's neon signs along Edmonton's Gateway Boulevard welcoming you to the city and inviting you to take a trip to the spa. Likewise, our legislative assemblies have become agencies to reduce any impediment to capital's flow, most notably in the currents that take our political leaders and their advisors back and forth between jobs in government and the corporate board.

The pace of human thinking, sharing and deliberation cannot compete with this rushing speed of images or money. Perhaps that is why so many experience suffering of the mind or body; without a public place where we can engage and prompt each other to think about that which we do not yet know, we can only but feel dis-ease. The symptoms of this are everywhere, from the legal drugging of our schoolchildren where an overcrowded classroom and lack of playtime might be behind inattention to the rise of atavistic neo-fascist leaders near and far around the world.

Here, under the reign of this story, the classroom as a potential place of action is under constant attack to become even more standardized and beholden not to each who is present but to the arbitrary designation of qualification standards set by status quo functionaries. This is sophistry. We might live in the greatest age of sophistry the world has known. Preparing kids to be workers for the 21st-century economy and the emergence of life-skills programs in public schools are two of many examples of sophistry's *raison d'être*. In times past, some governments actually legislated against both the practice of child labour and thinking of kids in these terms.

Our Focus on Education as an Epistemological Rather Than an Ontological Question

Our mainstream education history—and the one still haunting us now—assumes that education is an epistemological problem that we can solve when we finally get our objectives and techniques right and our assessments standardized, straight and valid (in the narrow statistical sense of the word). The question that has historically dominated the development of formal curriculum leading to our epistemological focus is, “What is most worth knowing?” This question as a guide should be abandoned as quickly as possible given the fact that no one can even say *what is not worth knowing* for every child in each political jurisdiction (den Heyer 2009c).

What happens when we shift our educational focus toward our assumptions about who we think—ontologically—we humans are? Is there a human nature, for example? What capacities are all humans potentially capable of expressing? What is our relationship to the nonhuman world, from the menstrual moon to the innumerable microbes in our guts? Ontologically, what is and therefore should be our relationship to the earth—the very *humus* of our being, from which English speakers derive (from Latin) *humans* and *humility*? What of our schooled disciplines can help us all address such ontological questions?

Switching the essential educational questions from epistemology to ontology allows us to ask, “Who do we think we might become through our study together?”

Motivation Talk

We need to stop speaking about motivation, including external and internal motivation and other relatively useless distinctions. Rather, the educational speaks for intention and willfulness, being seized by a seemingly intractable problem or of some terrible beauty that demands our energetic attention. Why, for example, did the steps on this trail fail to survive the winter? Why are trade treaties negotiated in private without a public hearing (eg, the Trans-Pacific Partnership)? Here, the ontological and animation—not motivation—come together.

What does motivation have to do with, for example, falling in love? When we fall in love, what are we falling from and what are we falling into? For me, thinking ontologically about what a thinking education might be, when we fall in love we are falling from the illusion that we are a singular being, self-contained and autonomous. Rather we fall into a relational reality where there is no “one” but only a multiple of equally existing actualities and potentialities. That’s me—Kent—while a proper noun is not a “one” but a multiple of multiples within a multiple of relations (human and other), a realization I can only come to think about through falling into a love that shatters everything I had had planned for that day and the days to follow (den Heyer 2009b). Indeed, such an *event* shatters everything I had been taught about individuality as a separated independent entity from my ecosystemic reality, a teaching that seems to me to be at the core of our current neoliberal psychosis.

Now, everything is changed. Now, what I thought I was or thought about the world no longer either makes sense or animates me. Now, I must ask, “Given this event of falling in love, or being seized by a conundrum that defies my habitual sense making, about what and with whom must I now faithfully think?”

Like love as an event, we are now confronted with the question and task of “fidelity,” which is when, for Badiou (2001, 50), the question of ethics (and I argue the educational) begins. Let us therefore speak of animation not motivation and of our ontological premises regarding human being and becoming rather than epistemological shadow games and parlor tricks that only serve to sell books about the newest innovative techniques of information and opinion management in the service of the status quo.

Intelligence Talk

This point above links to my final point regarding the ways many of us do not think well enough about a thinking education. *As with motivation, we—teachers, students, parents, all of us—should never again speak of or about intelligence* when we speak about our youth or ourselves. Intelligence, its measurement, its possession—who has it and who does not—is a fool’s game birthed from the two-headed serpent of eugenics and Euro-American Empire (Winfield 2007).

Would we talk about the potential of falling in love as a matter of intelligence? Could any parent believe that it is only reserved for one child, but not the other, who scores well on a test? Does it matter whether you are in the Dash 1 stream (academic) or Dash 2 (nonacademic)? No.

Let us instead think, along with Badiou's (2001, 66) insight, about an ethic of truths premised on "the strong, simple idea that every existence can one day be seized by what happens to it and subsequently devote itself to that which is valid for all." Indeed, this fact of our lives is why many of us sit here together today.

Like action, an event "is the 'infinite improbability' which occurs regularly."

So, to return to my title, "A Thinking Education," we can say that one response to the question regarding what is educational about education is a kind of thinking that lies beyond the getting "anything done" logic that, I suspect, stems from our culture's narrow demands for schooling to primarily serve qualification and socialization aims.

This is a thinking that requires we teachers to recognize that today's formal programs of study are sophistic neoliberal political projects that require uncovering as such to promote a place with students where we may come to recognize our lives through the action that is thinking together. To be clear, it is not that qualification and socialization aims are not necessary. Rather, it is to suggest that they are insufficient for a kind (of) education that approximates our ideals and mission statements about schooling.

The challenge is that we must have humility in this enterprise for we can no more schedule thinking for ourselves or our students anymore than we can schedule when we will fall in love. On this point Arendt ([1958] 1998, 178, 246) was concise:

The new always happens against the over-whelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle... Like action ... in the language of natural science, it is the "infinite improbability which occurs regularly."

Thinking is untimely in this way, but also in another way that defies our assessment schedules. When it happens, we leave the time of *chronos* and enter a time of *now*; when, to borrow from Robert Frost, we enter a time not of length but of height.

Many challenges work against thinking in schools and beyond that encourage us not to bother with the uncertainty, the alienation and the simple difficulty of thinking. Many successful students learn to say, "Just tell me what I need to know, I do not want to have to think about it."

A thinking education also faces dangers we must avoid: to mistake the way we have come to think as the *only* way to think about something, as though anyone who thinks differently needs to submit to our version of thought or love or good teaching. Recall the mythological figure of Procrustes who forced guests to fit his guest bed through the tortures of stretching or amputation (den Heyer and van Kessel 2015). No one ever exactly fit, including Procrustes when he was captured and forced by Theseus to be "fitted" according to the dimensions of his own guest bed. We have too many examples of such evil thought. Or, perhaps, these people in fact did not really "think" at all. For example, Butler (2011, para 10) offers a lesson taken from her reading of Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report of the Banality of Evil*:

Indeed, her indictment of Eichmann reached beyond the man to the historical world in which true thinking was vanishing and, as a result, crimes against humanity became increasingly “thinkable.” The degradation of thinking worked hand in hand with the systematic destruction of populations.

Arendt ([1963] 2006, 276) offers us some wisdom from personally witnessing the trial and the man and the recounting of his historical circumstances:

The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal.

The crime? “I just wanted to know what I needed to know. I didn’t want to have to think about it.”

Coda

The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.

—Herbert Spencer

Action, thinking with Arendt, requires honouring all our relations and recognizing that we can only become more than we have been taught through our interaction, which, in turn, requires that teachers, despite all discouragements, endeavour to save themselves from being mere functionaries of the State, or the state of unthinking, that is accepting ‘the way it is’ without critique, and thus action. To become more than this is only possible because teachers have students in their care, students waiting to help and engage in the potential of turning the classroom space into a place of action and becoming.

The Unthinking Terror of “The One”

Several decades ago, rogue US thinker Robert Anton Wilson noted how human thinking gets badly tangled through the language we use to think. Or, perhaps just as accurately, we get *tangled in language that thinks us*. He suggested daily practices we could use to improve our thinking. For example, he suggested, when we talk, that we try to replace the word *is* with “it seems to me” to foreground the active role language plays in how we think our world. This might work against habits to mistake our thought with what *our world may be*. He was hopeful we could improve our collective futures this way. Perhaps, today, all we can hope is that such practice might reduce how often we express our smallmindedness.

Another suggestion Wilson offered was to replace the word *the* with “sombutnotal.” The only definite article in the English language, *the*, precedes a noun giving the noun its definiteness. Other languages, like German, also have definite articles. Perhaps the Holocaust would have been more difficult to carry out, and thus more lives saved, if language did not have a definite article but something like *sombutnotal*—some but not all. “Yes, but, Mein Fuehrer, ‘sombutnotal Jews’? Which ones?” All down the Nazi German police order, more nuanced differentiations and judgments would have to be made and actions delayed. Or so Wilson hoped.

Here in North America, we have our own examples, including government and everyday stupidities visited upon “The Indian,” reducing their diverse nations, cultures and people to the singular. Talk about language being tangled. Scene: A boat, 1492—“This is India! These are, therefore, Indians!” Know history so you do not repeat it? Many still talk derogatorily about The Indians today. Hmm—*sombutnotal* white people still don’t know geography or where they live! Quick test: From what language is the word *Saskatchewan* and what does it mean? Same question: *Canada*?

Terror: the reduction of inherent complexity and multiplicity of people and our world to the absolute singularity of the nothing in particular.

To speak of *The* Indians, *The* Jews, like *The* Muslims or *The* Any “One” is terror: the reduction of inherent complexity and multiplicity of people and our world to the absolute singularity of the nothing in particular. This first, or rather, initiating terroristic act leads to what Badiou names as disaster. Disaster “is terror directed at everyone ... the pure and simple reduction of all to their being-for-death” (Badiou 2001, 77). Now mass-lumped into “The” group, all become either of no concern or beings-for-death through a denial of everyone’s particular capacity to become humanly unique. When you are part of “The...” there is no you—granddaughter of, son of, partner of, teacher of—to take into account. There is only the singularity of your being “The...” and nothing about the uniqueness of your suffering or potential becoming to consider.

A shocking observation is the way news in paper, online, on TV and on bathroom toilet stalls repeats this horrific simplicity of the singular: “The Americans bomb another country...”; “The Canadians declare a wait-and-see response”; “Jenny is a...” This form of public education makes thinking dumbly more possible. The “the...” and “is” ground the terroristic thinking of atavistic nationalists, racists, misogynists and homophobes, and those with phobias about transgender people. This last group can be especially troublesome to such minds. The fact of their existence troubles a desire for simplicity, for actually having to think, to differentiate with care, and take particular cases into account rather than rely on the generalized “The... is...” or “is not.”

The “Us” completes the necessary binary-based thinking of “The One-Other.” For example, during World War II, Vichy France passed a law that regulated the status of Jewish people based on their supposed threat to society. Today, in France, as throughout Europe, there are those pushing for similar laws against refugees and immigrants, advocating that they are viruses sickening the economic-political body (for they are now the same) of Our-One people-nation (Badiou 2001, 33).

Badiou ([1997] 2003, 8) asks how the “noxious question ‘What is a French person?’ come[s] to install itself at the heart of the public sphere? But everyone knows there is no tenable answer to this question other than through the persecution of those people arbitrarily designated as the non-French.” This mirrors the questions that the Nazis asked: What is a German person? There are those who are “arbitrarily designated” as not belonging—not French, not German, not “us.”

We have seen this dangerous thinking in Trump’s campaign and presidency and in Canada’s last federal election, and, in the most recent federal Conservative leadership race. This “Us-as-One versus (through refusal, expulsion or extermination) Them-as-One” mentality turns socio-political discourse from questions about what collective conditions we could legislate to support economic well-being for all, access to child and elder care for all, and sustainability for all into sloppy “for us-not them” group think with usually disastrous results. As is abundantly evident in North America, if you are not a billionaire or part of the banking class, you are not part of the current “for US” regardless what you think about immigrants or refugees. As the late comedian George Carlin put it, “They call it the American dream because you have to be asleep to believe it.” Too many of us need to wake up and think again about the terroristic appeals to “The Us-as-One.”

We Have Never Left When We Were Before: “Terribly and Terrifyingly Normal”

In her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Arendt ([1963] 2006) examined the Nazi logistical manager who facilitated the Holocaust, not as a demonic force, but rather as a thoroughly mediocre bureaucrat. In this case, the actions of a painfully ordinary citizen had massive repercussions. For Arendt, evil is not only politically organized and industrial-level violence against targeted groups, but also the bureaucratic and banal “non-thinking” routines that underlie such violence:

Indeed, her indictment of Eichmann reached beyond the man to the historical world in which true thinking was vanishing and, as a result, crimes against humanity became increasingly “thinkable.” The degradation of thinking worked hand in hand with the systematic destruction of populations. (Butler 2011, para 10)

For Arendt ([1963] 2006, 49) as witness and trial reporter, evil resided in the lack of thinking exemplified by Eichmann: “The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else.”

The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it

implied [that this new type of criminal] commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong. (Arendt [1963] 2006, 276)

Would *sombutnotal* rather than the definite article have helped to think better in these circumstances even if just a bit? We cannot say because “The Jew-as-One-The-Us-as-One,” which is characteristic of evil thinking, carried the day.

Some Kind (of) Social Studies Education

All these thoughts haunt my teachings. I teach senior university education students pursuing a teaching career in high school social studies. In the first class every semester, I introduce *sombutnotal* and make a case for its importance as they teach history. Social studies likely becomes where many youth learn to officially divide the world into the “us-them” formulations outside the private circle of their family and neighbourhood friends (Willinsky, 1998). The way teachers speak about that world becomes crucial if we wish to convey both humility and verve to explore our world’s layers and vexing questions about our place within.

Sadly, research by history education scholars in North America convincingly suggests instead that the power of “the” singular reigns. Many students learn to singularize governments, social movements and other collective agents (eg, political parties, unions). They further endow these diverse collectives with human emotions. They learn, for example, to speak like “Sure we made mistakes in the past but we are a fair nation...” or “They died for our freedom...” or “We try to do better but the government felt it had to lock up Japanese citizens of the country because it was afraid...” or “The Europeans treated the Indians badly.” “We” and “they” encourage bad unspecified thinking.

Of course, we all must reduce the complexity of historical and contemporary realities in service of necessary cognitive management. That is not a problem. A problem lies in our forgetfulness that we do so. This forgetfulness then leads to a totalizing assuredness that “we” know “them” or even “ourselves.”

A beneficial humanizing education would focus on facing up to the diverse complexities of worldfulness through recognizing how we have learned to divide the world. This rethinking requires some fine-tuning in how we come to language the world in “the’s” and “is’s” rather than *sombutnotal* and “it seems to me.”

This in turn would better support the possibility that we might expand our circles of compassion to include those who our revanchist leaders would have us expel. Just ask yourself if you are the “not us” who has had their pension taken away, their union disbanded, job prospects disappear, student debt skyrocket, work conditions worsen and their profession turned into casual labour or who blames the other-not-us for our unfortunate redundancy in our current age of automation. Appreciate how many of us do not anymore count as the “us.” While this is neither a new nor a unique insight, it bears repeating and daily practice toward improved thinking through a thoughtful use of language.

We all must reduce the complexity of historical and contemporary realities in service of necessary cognitive management. That is not a problem. A problem lies in our forgetfulness that we do so.

Lane Muses

I live in Edmonton, Treaty 6 land. Like many prairie city houses, mine has a back lane thoroughfare. This block is magpie territory.

When some misguided other bird sits on a tree here, magpies begin unceasing harassment. They leap from branch to branch, one in front of the trespasser, one behind, one usually a branch above, and one seemingly a rover flying in and out as required.

What I have witnessed time and again is intelligence equal to wolves and other pack animals, like humans. They even have our neighbourhood cats trained. Once our cats would track a magpie up a tree, they no longer bother. Can't win. Magpies walk around like they own the place. My friend Dwayne Donald tells a story about this he heard from his elders.

Long ago, the four- and two-legged creatures organized a race to determine once and for all who should be able to eat the other. Each group gathered in their respective camps. After much deliberation, on the day of the race, the four legged sent their fastest buffalo while the two legged sent their fastest human. From the beginning, the race was not going well for the two legged. Just as the buffalo was about to cross the finish line well ahead of the human, a magpie came out from the mane of the buffalo and flew first across the finish line. The issue was thus decided. That does explain a lot about magpies.

I delight at watching magpies from my back deck hop from branch to branch or along the lane. They are deliberate, graceful and precise when they hop. They are also often irritatingly loud and boastful as well. To date I have seen only one one-legged magpie, a quiet bird that showed up to eat occasionally from my bird feeder. I have not seen that bird in some time. Once here, now gone.

It is difficult for a magpie to hop with grace on one leg. Don't take my word and try. To be graceful on one leg while pretending to have two is what many Canadians have been trying to do with half a history about who we were, are and hope to be. Here, now, we are, but how do we do so gracefully if we can only hop on one leg?

Who Are We?

King (2003, 9) reminds us “Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous.” Stories are wondrous because they are powerful medicine—but, as the ancient Greek word *pharmakon* denotes about medicine, that which we once needed can also become our poison.

In his concluding speech for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Justice Murray Sinclair said, “Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem—it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us.” Education has emerged (as it often does) as a way to address this problem. Canadians need to ask, therefore, what kind of problem do we face and what kind of education might help? And what ideas might assist us to educate so as to improve our Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations?

The first step is to learn more about the Treaties, the great meetings of many different nations on this land (eg, the 1701 Great Peace of Montreal), the *Indian Act* (1876), key Supreme Court of Canada decisions related to land and resource claims, and Indian Residential Schools, among other regionally significant topics and events. This will be an emotional education. On this issue, we deal with not only an information deficit, but also, too often, a refusal to know.

Any honest historical examination of our contemporary relations will challenge many mainstream Canadians’ sense of themselves and cherished myths about our country—including the belief that Canada is a meritocracy; that we, unlike those in the US, are progressing in our race relations; and that those who represent us in governments actually have both the desire and power to solve the structure-supported inequities that divide us into communities of haves and have-nots. As scholar Daniel Francis suggests, a myth is not necessarily a lie, but rather a half-truth wrapped in desired ideals promoted through the stories we repeat through textbooks, advertisements, movies and the news. This makes dealing with the officially propagated Canadian half-truths a very touchy subject. In addition, such myths become even less tenable when we confront some ugly beliefs non-Indigenous people continue to spread about those many have never even met.

Within six months of coming to Alberta from Turkey for an academic position, my Turkish-born-and-raised wife learned all “The Indian” racial stereotypes so many Canadians born here catch simply by growing up in this country (she was also told that “Indians” don’t know how to drive, which was a new stereotype for me). At that time, she only knew people who worked at a university laboratory with master’s or doctoral degrees—all very educated people. So, again, what kind of education do we need at this crucial historical moment? I identify three key concepts as useful to a needed educational response: *curriculum as encounter*, *narrative competence* and *grand narratives*.

Curriculum as Encounter

Curriculum as encounter is the idea that education, in contrast to training, begins when teachers and students re-examine what we have already learned about a people or history, or, for that matter, anything at all.

For example, I have taught postsecondary students at the University of British Columbia, Kent State University (Ohio) and now at the University of Alberta. Remarkably, the vast majority of university students in each of these places when questioned about their views as to why many Indigenous people face regrettable life challenges repeat almost verbatim the stereotypes of an

“Imaginary Indian” (Francis 1992), placing the blame squarely at the backwardness and laziness of those cultures and peoples. Where do these impressively similar prejudices come from? How is it that, regardless of geography, so many of us have this “Imaginary Indian” free-floating in our minds?

Another example of this “imaginary” I learned in third grade when I went to the washroom. Unusually at school, I needed to go into a cubicle, as I had to poop. As I sat doing so, I read that “Jimmy is a fag” etched into the metal wall. On the other wall I read, “Jenny is a slut.” I did not know at the time what fag and slut actually meant or to what behaviour they specifically referred. I heard them before on the playground, of course. But, if asked, I would not have been able to provide a definition for fag or slut. I did know enough, however, to know that whatever they were, none of us wanted those labels attached to our name. Your name would be etched in one short sentence into metal, accused and sentenced—but why or for what?

While I have always identified as a heterosexual, I have been gay bashed (defined for me as a fist flying toward my face accompanied with the words “you f__ing fag”). In the eyes of some peers and random haters, I was just “faggy.”

I also learned much about trying to live a joyful erotic life from women, who managed, somehow, to build a solid sense of self-worth and exploration despite the metal sentences etched into school bathroom stalls.

An older man now, I think about how my own sexual-erotic life has been shaped as much by my fear of suffering from the fear of others as by any innate coding. Schools, reflecting their surrounding communities, are to some extent fear factories, where the young learn to fear to fit in appropriately; we get socialized and we get appropriated.

Appropriate is a funny word. In English, we spell the word *appropriate* as an adjective (suitable or proper in the circumstances) exactly the same way as we do *appropriate* as a verb (to take something for one’s own use, typically without the owner’s permission). What is considered appropriate is the result of numerous appropriations, reducing the complexity of life as an erotic adventure, for example, to acting appropriately. Of course, while many act appropriately, I think we all know that desire stains even our pristine pretensions.

Another educative word related to appropriate is *authorize*. To authorize is to give official approval. Put a slash in the word, and *author/ize* raises questions: Who writes and who wrote what I take to be authorized as appropriate? On what basis is this so? Who and from what demographic publishes the textbooks, owns the television stations, newspapers, movie studios? In what ways do snapchats, emoji’s of Facebook and movies form what we see of the world and of each other? The key here is that too few of us have rethought or recognized what we have already learned about the world and who belongs where and who does not, appropriately.

Here is another telling word related to the previous two: *apprehension*. Apprehension is a synonym for understand-

Educated apprehensions aptly describe the difficult work that is to engage with what we have learned simply by reading the bathroom stalls of our social worlds.

ing. Apprehension also means the arrest of someone or some opinion. Apprehension also describes a state of emotional disturbance or anticipation of adversity when what was previously apprehended is no longer in its appropriate place. Educated apprehensions aptly describe the difficult work that is to engage with what we have learned simply by reading the bathroom stalls of our social worlds.

Being educated does not mean, therefore, simply having achieved knowledge or the ability to do something. To be educated is also to have simultaneously acquired a somewhat predictable ignorance along with an emotional tendency to avoid issues that do not conform to the “instantaneous uptake” (Aoki 2000, 354) of our immediate understandings—that is, issues, people and/or behaviours that defy our efforts to immediately apprehend them (and about which we thereby often become apprehensive) (den Heyer and Conrad 2011).

To string these three words together, we learn to act *appropriately* as boys and girls, as erotic beings, as Canadians or as winners and losers from lessons learned from family, schools, media, corporations and governments. In each, power to *authorize* what is read, seen or judged as appropriate is not evenly distributed (check out the governing boards of our leading corporations for gender, racial and other examples of a lack of diversity). We observe, we learn, we play.

We also hold emotionally tight onto what we have learned. We rightly get *apprehensive* when what we have learned to apprehend of the world is shifted out of its proper place. Curriculum as encounter engages our apprehensions of the world so we might take responsibility to become more sovereign over what we deem appropriate behaviour, place and hopes about others and ourselves.

Given these words and their educative implications, I find it useful to distinguish between curriculum-as-encounter (ways our shared sense making is itself a historical legacy that requires explicit study) and curriculum-as-thing (body of facts, skills and attitudes to deliver to the student body). People commonly interpret curriculum as thing when they ask about the content students should acquire, what techniques assist in this acquisition and ways we might measure student acquisition. Hence, the tendency is “to see education as a matter of *production*, rather than *formation*” (Whitson 2008, 132, emphasis added). Both schooling as production and as formation have ends in mind. They differ, however, as production requires the general, comparable and exchangeable, while formation implies the particular, singular and irreplaceable.

Let me relate this distinction between curriculum as thing and as encounter more specifically in terms of a subject I have experience teaching in high schools and about in teacher education programs: history and social studies (note, however, that all disciplines are largely a study of the social):

Figure 1.

	“Curriculum as thing”	“Curriculum as encounter”
Understanding of history/social studies:	A body of information or dispositions and/or critical thinking skills to be conveyed to those who sit in front of us.	Content and thinking skills serve the end of helping students investigate the ways in which their thoughts and beliefs do not belong to them alone and the ways that interpretations/beliefs and ways of knowing impact pressing issues of social concern.
Questions guiding curricular planning:	Where do I go to get the stuff, how do I organize it, has somebody already done this, what are some of the best ways of teaching this in the classrooms?	In what ways do I arrange curriculum to allow us to investigate our own sense making about [insert concern or issue] and the ways it does not belong to us alone? Given the myriad of ways to interpret anything, how might “we” better articulate what is good to support in relation to pressing issues of concern? About what ought we to be concerned and, thus, think more deeply about?
Sense of time and purpose:	The “future” in terms of students’ grades, scholarships and passing the course while acquiring “necessary” content and competencies.	A “now” created between teacher and student through arranging inquiry into the knowledge we already possess, to learn <i>from</i> rather than <i>about</i> knowledge justified in terms of our being together now and not something later.

For those primarily oriented to curriculum as thing, students lack proper conduct and reasoning that more schooling will correct by applying the right information, techniques or brain research. For those working out of curriculum as encounter, students lack opportunity to re-evaluate right conduct and reasoning in the context of powerful socialization. Here we must speak about not only a freedom from that which inhibits but also a freedom to re-evaluate common sense to more consciously exercise a degree of sovereignty over those beliefs or scripts we too often perform without appreciation of their author/ization. An education that meets the needs of reconciliation requires a rethinking of how and what we have learned about this “Indian” and “ourselves” before we can meet others respectfully or become more than simply that we were taught “we” are.

Narrative Competence

The German scholar Jorn Rüsen developed the second concept, narrative competence. Rüsen (1989, 39) defines historical consciousness as “an operation of human intellection rendering present actuality intelligible while fashioning its future perspective.” Such “rendering” takes place through “narrative competence”—the ability to derive moral obligations in the present from inherited stories from or about the past (p 41).

Narratively competent people recognize that historical narratives are not the same as the past, while also recognizing possible lessons from these social stories to guide present and future courses of action. In our Canadian context, I extend this competence to include the ability to learn from different narrative templates or forms of storying. In his book chapter “What Is It About Us That You Don’t Like?” in *The Truth About Stories*, King provides historical insights about our relationships through allegory. He writes about ducks, coyotes and deer to express many possible lessons helpful to becoming better humans through living better relationships. There are also oral histories elders tell reflecting different traditions and place-based histories (eg, wampum belts) among other forms of historical knowledge.

I share King’s chapter with my education students and ask, “What do you take from what you think might be going on here?” The most common response is that white people are the coyotes cajoling with promises the feathers off the Indian ducks. When the feathers, being off their source of luster, fade, the coyote comes back again asking for more. Maybe. In itself, I read the chapter as not only a story of historical crime perpetrated but also of a human frailty that made and make such perpetrations possible if we do not heed well the stories. It is an allegory of human relations, independent of tribal and historical desirous affiliation.

The capacity to see value and to take lessons from divergent ways of storying will be crucial to not just reconciliation but to another question, “Who do we think we are and might we become?” A most basic response is that we are a community of divergent stories trying to become congruent enough to negotiate circumstance and the rocky waters of collective life with its capricious competing needs and demands. We need to heed advice from the many with whom we share this single place and moment. To begin to do so, mainstream Canadians will need to rethink the dominant tales learned within and outside schools in advertisements, museums and pop culture that scholars refer to as “grand narratives.”

Grand Narratives

Workings against narrative competence are grand narratives. Grand narratives offer people simple and easily digestible plot lines that contradict the complexity of the past and its uncertain emergence into a present; that is, the present always could have become different. They give us a story around which “we” unite, as with the US “freedom quest” narrative, English Canada’s “the peaceable country of progress,” or Quebecois’ “we victims struggling against English domination,” which contain the half-truths and cherished ideals that make them so emotional and difficult to question. Such plots, however, diminish the complexity of the historical processes and past choices made by those deemed influential (and those less so).

Grand narratives also celebrate some actors and actions, and quite effectively exclude others from a place in common knowledge. For example, Quebecois scholar Jocelyn Létourneau (2006, 74) found in his study that when most young Quebecois adults are asked to write the story of Quebec they tell a story in which “women, Aboriginal people and immigrants are secondary characters.” My research with western Canadian university students along with research in the US finds strikingly similar exclusions. Stereotypes about imaginary Indians are not the only shockingly similar stories students in diverse locations repeatedly have learned to tell.

Now we need a kind of education that engages with the stereotypes and educated apprehensions to re-story how we make sense of those others and ourselves.

In one of my published studies (den Heyer and Abbott 2011), a future social studies teacher reflected on how a grand narrative shaped her understandings, “[F]rom kindergarten to graduation, we are constantly bombarded (and completely unaware) of the grand narrative. We learn how white men civilized the aboriginals, settled North America and created Canada.” To paraphrase Létourneau again, through these grand narratives, “we” become easily ensnared by “mistaken identities” through “a series of references or canonical figures that sometimes narrowly coincides with what Canada or Quebec was or actually is.” Again, it is not so much that these stories are wrong; they are inadequate, especially when viewed as being the past or when they are not contrasted with other ways of making historical sense.

To be Canadian is to be unsure of who we are. In contrast to those declarations made by our southern neighbour about who the powerful there believe they are, we are in contrast a country of questions about who we should story ourselves to be and become. I like that because we have more potential for enriching conversations about our possible and preferable futures. Now we need a kind of education that engages with the stereotypes and educated apprehensions to re-story how we make sense of those others and ourselves.

Stories are wondrous things but are indeed dangerous. This is not to throw out what we have been taught but rather to edit by writing in the margins of those pages and to discern what is but a half-truth and what needs further work for “a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is” (Lear 2006, 103).

Lost Aim: Socrates in Post-Truth Times

Modified from "An Analysis of Aims and the Educational 'Event.'" In Canadian Journal of Education 38, no 1 (2015): 1-27.

In a well-received article, Thornton and Barton (2010) review the range of aims offered by history and social studies teachers throughout the 20th century to justify a place for the subjects in the US public school curriculum.³ In regards to such aims, the authors conclude that teachers of history and social studies should stand together to face a common adversary: those who promote either subject area as an induction into nationalistic patriotic pride. They offer as a more palatable alternative aim: social education for democratic citizenship. These options, however, do not adequately account for what is at stake in questions of educational aims in contemporary times.

As explored here, socialization and sophistry are the two adjectives that best describe the dominant vision of education today, and that are promoted by erstwhile teachers and by the global education reform movement (GERM) (see Sahlberg 2011). These stand in contrast not to citizenship or patriotism, but to the always-present potentiality of a Socratic form of the "educational." Whereas sophistry and socialization aim to empower students into an existing order of opinion, the educational begins precisely where such orders break down to instigate a "truth process" inaugurated by an "event" (Badiou 2001):

[A]s with anything that constitutes an event, worlds are turned upside down, neuroses engendered, terrible beauties are born and education departments are forced to confront something that they are professionally required to find incomprehensible, namely, the desire to be educated, as something over and above the development of a specialist-knowledge, vocational competence, or the vague promotion of currently venerated 'values.' (Cooke 2013, 3)

The curricular question is less "what knowledge is of most worth?" (that everyone in a political jurisdiction supposedly needs to know) and more pertinently "how might the forms of knowledge (those required for qualification and socialization) be arranged for the possibility of an "event" to occur and the educational in the form of a 'truth process' inaugurated" (see Badiou 2001)? Such a question incites us to better balance schooling's *socialization* function with its *educational* potential that lies within people's always-present capacity for "becoming subjects" to their learning and lives (Badiou 2001). I end this piece with a call for mainstream teachers to attend more closely to what we might learn about the educational from North American Indigenous traditions.

Sophists and Socrates

Current Euro-American debates about the aims of education continue those ancient between sophistic and Socratic versions of education. For the former, education consisted of instruction into the skills of appearing wise to acquire wealth and status within an inherited state of things. For Plato, Socrates provided an education that was, in contrast, based on a recollection of what was already known, bringing such into the light of re-evaluation and reworking to embody a life of inquiry, a life of action and beginnings.

3. The need for justification for the subjects in the US is worth the attention of Canadians. As the common cliché has it, when "America sneezes, Canada catches a cold."

As Plato recounts, Socrates was an Athenian war hero without property who wandered about the city engaging all who sought understanding. He charged nothing for what may be learned as, he claimed, he had no-thing to sell. This indeed confused many, for it was well known that the Oracle of Delphi had pronounced Socrates to be the wisest Athenian alive. Socrates, however, thought the Oracle wrong, at a cost that he would be asked to pay. He premised his method of questioning on an axiom of equality: that both he and his interlocutors possessed equal capacity for “recollection” of what they already knew but had not adequately re-cognized (Felman 1982). Each therefore needed the other to possibly encounter that “gap” or disjuncture (ie, lacuna, aporia) between what one thinks, one thought and what one can claim to know. What might be learned from Socrates was how to take up a wise relationship to knowing and knowledge.

The sophists, in contrast, sold knowledge and (the appearance) of knowing contested by rival schools of thought and held as required by fashion to be necessary for the exclusively male citizens to make their way:

Education is seen as the proper pursuit of the individual subject’s interest in accord with the rule of the state.... To know, in short, is to be properly instructed in an interest in interest [whereby] one’s knowledge will translate into better wealth and one’s wealth into better knowledge. (Bartlett 2011, 52)

For the sophist, what is most worth knowing is that which serves the persona of appearances and self-interest, or reinforces desires to be productively useful in and/or to the state. Bartlett (2011, 61) offers a most succinct set of distinctions between sophistry and a Socratic form of education: “The sophist, concerning the truth, must be a man of perspective rather than conviction, of judgment rather than thought, of interest and not principle.”

Socrates enacted education as an inquiry consisting of “truth seeking, truth dwelling, and truth sharing” (Smith 2000, 17). Then, as now, truths refer not to an actualized idealization or final answer, but to the material remains of thought in books, art, love or equations born from our taking up a relational stance among the “known-void-not yet known.” Here I turn to a leading theoretician of the “void,” truth and subjectivity today, Alain Badiou.

Rather than grounding education in epistemological questions (theories of knowing), Badiou details an ontological orientation (theories of being) to subjectivity that has vital implications for aims talk in education. While he never addresses the subject in detail, Badiou (2005, 9) suggests that education in its most honorific sense has never meant more than this: “to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them.” As such, Badiou’s interpretation of the “void-event-becoming subject via a truth procedure” helps us dig into the architecture of a Socratic form of the educational.

The One Is a (K)not

Badiou makes several key moves to rehabilitate contemporary interpretations of “truths” aiding thought about an educational event. First, he situates philosophy in a supporting role to his interpretation of ontology derived from mathematical set theory. Mathematics is ontology for Badiou. Or, more accurately, mathematical set theory provides a precise mapping to think ontology and our contemporary configuration as symbolically represented beings making our way

according to those identities and beliefs required by the situation in which we have been socialized (or have been set up). In contrast to mother tongues, mathematics has the virtue of detailing without the drippy multiple of meanings that any one word has in relation to another. It simply mathematically maps what is.

Through set theory, Badiou's foundational move is to claim that, ontologically, there is no "one" or "One," "for the one is *not*" (Badiou 2005, 23; emphasis in original). Any humanly affirmative ethics, or, as I argue, educational aim, cannot be founded on an ontological simulacrum of a "one" nation to which we must be patriotic or democratic vision into which teachers assume to socialize their youth. For example, no one-Canada exists and if you think "it" does, you should travel.

Rather, Badiou (2001, 25) asks that we think about ethical subjectivity (and here argued as an educational aim) in relation to the "without-one" at the heart of all situations: "The multiple 'without-one'—every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples—is the law of being. The only stopping point is the void."

The "void" lies at the heart of all knowledge claims; that at any given and unpredictable moment one may encounter a person, a thought, a question that causes an "event" utterly voiding the legitimacy of what we just had thought or desired about ourselves or anything in particular (eg, how falling in love shatters everything we thought about "our" situation as an any-"one" mind-ing our own business before the event or the "fall" into love). Set theory accounts for this fact of the void by the variously named "null," "empty" or "generic set" included, as a foundational axiom, in every constructed set.⁴

Like love as an event, encountering the void creates the possibility for a truth process. Here, *the* question of ethics, and I argue, the educational, begins:

There is always only one question in the ethic of truths: how will I, as some-one, continue to exceed my own being? How will I link the things I know, in a consistent fashion, via the effects of being seized by the not-known? (Badiou 2001, 50)

In this process, a becoming subject embodies a "disinterested interest" in inherited opinions and rather attempts to articulate what lies in the interest of all, regardless of identification, concern for status or self-interest:

4. Set theory is the theory of sets or configurations of numbers, objects or in Badiou's terms, elements (*characteristics* might be a more comprehensible and approximate term for elements for readers). Set theory is a hotly contested area of mathematics. In fact, and apropos, set theory is an area of inquiry itself comprising many sub-sets. What Badiou takes from the set of set theories concerns their ontological implications. He pays attention to the null or empty set; or again, in Badiou's term, the *generic set*—generic because, having no specified elements (or characteristics) itself, it is taken to be part of all sets while, simultaneously, belonging to none exclusively. As an axiom upon which set theories proceed, all sets, whatever their configuration, contain the variously named null, empty or generic set.

“ The multiple ‘without-one’—every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples—is the law of being. The only stopping point is the void.”

Badiou (2004, 25)

All my capacity for interest, which is my own perseverance in being, has poured out into the future consequences of the solution to this scientific problem, into the examination of the world in the light of love's being-two, into what I will make of my encounter, one night, with the eternal Hamlet, or into the next stage of the political process, once the gathering in front of the factory has dispersed. (Badiou 2001, 50)

Distinguishing between a mathematical point and trajectory provides another way to interpret possible educational implications of Badiou's truth and event. A point is the intersection of two lines where position alone is considered. Interpreting Badiou, a point lies at the intersection of the body and the categories that position that body as a "consolidated identity" of "one" (eg, Mexican or Canadian or black or white male or female, straight or queer) for which the situation can make a count (or put into account such as on a baby's birth certificate, driver's license, student ID or social security number or who ends up etched and sentenced into a bathroom stall).

A trajectory, in contrast, contains an educational third line that cuts or curves across all surface "appearances" of those points constituting a given system of accounting. Set in motion by an event, a "becoming subject" constitutes a third line that is neither identity nor flesh. What is this third line? "This someone is simultaneously himself . . . and in excess of himself" (Badiou 2001, 45).

Here, in pursuit of that which is an interminable "excess of," a "becoming-subject" seeks to name what will be absurd not to have believed, "making seem possible precisely that which, from within the situation, is declared to be impossible. [...] an event-ality still suspended from its name" (Badiou 2001, 121, 126). The proper verb tense, therefore, with Badiou's event, truth-process and the educational is neither the present nor the past, but rather the future anterior—*this will have been true*.

By maintaining fidelity to articulating the implications of the event, a "becoming subject" declares "this will have been true," pursuing exactly "what it will be absurd *not to have believed*" (Gibson 2006, 88, emphasis added). For Badiou, such eventful truths are beginnings that ought to be "measured by the re-beginnings they authorize" (cf Bartlett 2011, 118).

So potentially begins an education that is educational. Working out of a Badiou-ian framing of Socratic teachings "is [to give] what you do not have to someone who does not want it"; in other words of giving the lack of knowledge (thus the very basis of all knowledge) to those who do not want it' (Bartlett 2011, 57).⁵ Try thinking about that.

Socrates was put on trial, charged with corrupting the youth through his teachings (in addition to charges of "impiety" for failing to acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledges). Strangely, Socrates never claimed to be a teacher or to have anything specifically to teach. What, Bartlett asks, does Socrates fail to do to the youth? What rule does he fail to satisfy?

The simple answer is of course that Socrates has no interest in this state of things [...] For this singular figure, what is in the interest of all is the very basis of all thought and discourse and not the contingent fabrication of a particular knowledge founded on excessive conceit and ignorant rule. (Bartlett 2011, 53)

5. Here Bartlett cites Lacan's description of love and applies it to Socratic education.

Socrates himself constituted a potential “void-event” whose presence in the city voided the conceits of wisdom taught by the sophists. He, thereby, failed to subordinate students’ capacities for truthful inquiry to the interests of “just the way that things are.” This greatly upset those whose positions necessitated, as Cooke notes above, that the youth required the right kind of schooling for the kind of citizenship required either by the state or educational status quo. Those primarily concerned with professional self-interest have sharp teeth when provoked. At his trial’s conclusion, the Athenian leaders gave Socrates a choice: leave the city or die. He drank the hemlock.

Flipping the Grid

Unlocking the potential benefit of “aims talk” requires that we attend to the multiple domains that reflect the many contradictory social demands placed on schools (Labaree 2012). As detailed by Thornton and Barton, qualification and socialization constitute two worthy school domains toward which such aims as preparation for democratic citizenship point.⁶ We, of course, cannot exist without cultural and social inheritances to make sense of the world that begins with language.

The educational constitutes another domain that is distinct and largely ignored in qualification and socialization rationales. It is to speak for this crucial aspect of education that we mainstream scholars would do well to draw on a broader set of references. Before making this case, I briefly summarize my argument thus far.

Recall that reading the educational event through Badiou necessitates first an ontological orientation to human situations rather than constructing the school issue of learning primarily as an epistemological problem the solution for which lies in getting our knowledge, techniques or reasoning procedures finally right.

From a Badiou-ian ontological orientation, we can map our inheritances as a set-up of identifications, assumptions, bodily dispositions and orientations to knowledge and knowing. From this ontological mapping, we can also account for an excess that inheres in every situation potentially voiding what was once taken as “just the way it is” and initiates the educational (eg, *falling* in love; being seized by a social, artistic or scientific contradiction we now must solve).

Our contemporary mainstream version of curriculum and “aims talk” reflect a sophistic orientation to the question of what is worth knowing: “Socrates opposes sophistry as the only kind of education recognizable to the state” (Bartlett 2011, 37). This is a kind of education marked by what Bartlett calls (1) the sophistic *end* (of equipping the youth with “skills” to make their way in the state), (2) by sophistic *practice* (which treats education as a commodity to be exchanged for other goods) and (3) by sophistic *theory*, “which is exemplified in the ‘democratic’ relativism of Protagoras’s maxim that ‘man is the measure of all things’” (Bartlett 2011, 37).

Here in Canada we are blessed to be able to learn from other traditions with well-developed insights regarding the overlapping domains of qualification, socialization and the educational inaugurated, as explored here, via the educational event.

6. In such appeals what is often left unaddressed are questions about when that preparation will be actualized and questions about the idealism in such a formulation of assuming a “democracy” into which we are preparing the young (see Couture 1997; Dean 2009).

The wide range of North American Indigenous forms of education each account for these overlapping domains. To take but one example from the vast oral record and written archive detailing such, I turn to Osage scholar George E Tinker (2004, 116) and his description of his “event”:

The following example is an incident that occurred while I was making the rite of vigil (sometimes popularly called vision quest) about two decades ago. I still live out of the experience and still work to understand the event more fully. I was engaging in this ceremony largely for cultural and personal identity reasons. I had no expectation of really having a vision of any kind. For me the experience was to be one of intense prayer and physical endurance. I had decided to spend four days and four nights in this ceremony, in an isolated location in a very small half-dome lodge with no food and no water. My ancestors had done it. I felt a need to experience some sense of solidarity with them and with those Indian relatives who were still engaging in this ceremony. But a vision? I was too far gone for that, I assumed. Too much of a skeptic and too well-trained as an objective scholar. Moreover, this was not my first completion of this ceremony. I was already experienced and knew pretty much what to expect: hunger, thirst, unbearable heat in the daytime and cold at night.

Tinker (2004, 118) recounts four visits from a buffalo bull during his quest. As he describes, the buffalo did not speak nor did he see the being, but heard it:

It is now more than two decades later, and I am still struggling to understand what occurred on that day. I am long past the temptation to deny that it happened or to try explaining it away, since I have had other experiences even more remarkable than this—and even less explicable to a “theology and the natural sciences” audience.

We can note here a strong resonance to Badiou’s notion of the “event-ful” future anterior orientation—what *will* the visit or event *have meant*? Note that, as with Badiou, there is no Western scientifically objective verification for Tinker that an event happened, only a becoming subject whose capacities for truth processes an event has activated and which will require a great deal of work to articulate what the event will have meant. This is education or the educational in its most honorific form.

Also note that there is a socialization function (to join in experience with his ancestors) to qualify more deeply as a member of his group. Here we can see an instance of the fact that qualification and socialization need not be sophistic, but that depends on the aim we construct for such. Further, neither qualification nor socialization is opposed to the educational. Rather, a question that attends to each domain is needed to reflect the interpenetrated or fractal other-but-part within each: how might the forms of knowledge (those required for qualification and socialization) be arranged for the possibility of an event to occur and the educational inaugurated?

How might the forms of knowledge (those required for qualification and socialization) be arranged for the possibility of an event to occur and the educational inaugurated?

Finally, Tinker's essay explores his tradition's "socialization" in which humans, nation, citizenship and what constitutes disciplined understanding all take on very different forms and forms of meaning when placed in their intergenerational and codependency with nonhuman entities. This indeed may be a lesson we in the mainstream must heed. The fate of our ecological sustainability for human life depends on flipping the grid of mainstream talk about aims and citizenship. The alternative is to remain stuck in a "double bind"—that is, that we will continue to sophisticatedly think of aims tied to fantasized ideals of citizenship and nation-state that create the problems we then seek to fix with more of the same thinking (Bowers 1987, 2010; Dean 2009).

I humbly borrow Tinker's story not to show how Badiou details so well an educational event across all cultural milieus. Instead, I want to point to rich possibilities we might accrue by putting into conversation one tradition with another to make good sense of the educational. To do so, however, requires we in the mainstream confront our limited understandings of what might be educational.

This is an especially pertinent topic here in western Canada with current attempts to take up Aboriginal perspectives in the official program of social studies. Are we simply to add this perspective, however variously defined, to the qualification and socialization functions of an idealized citizenship tied to an equally idealized nation-state? Or must the terms change in the ways we might address the ontological presuppositions undergirding aims talk (eg, conceptions of the nation, nationalism, patriotism)? Or as Donald (2012) asks, "on whose terms will Aboriginal-Non Aboriginal perspectives meet" more generally (related to a host of long pressing issues) and more specifically, as explored here, as relates to the educational?

We ought to heed our own calls for multiple perspectives and expand how we teachers and students might interpret the educational aims. To not do so, the best we sophists can propose is sticking to a narrow and abstracted form of thinking about aims and citizenship tied to the nation-state, each of which (we are repeatedly told) will be actualized in promised wealth at an always soon-to-be-realized future time.

Doing Better Than Just Falling Forward: Supporting Education by Linking Subject Matter with Futures Thinking

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States justify school subjects as necessary preparations for the future. Yet, while put to heavy rhetorical use, we know little about how (if at all) teachers connect a futures dimension to their subject matter teaching and learning. A futures dimension inheres in human deliberations ranging from our everyday decisions to the more refined claims made in, for example, historical scholarship. I want to provide some examples of the use of the future as a rhetorical device, how science and social studies teachers take up the future, and an example of how we might include such in classrooms.

Implicit and Assumed Futures

Gough (1990) distinguishes between tacit, token and taken-for-granted uses of the future in educational discussions and documents. *Tacit* futures are of the implied type and never clearly stated: preparation for students' future adult life would be one example (eg, we need to grade to prepare kids for the real world). *Token* futures are more visible but consist of clichés, as can be read in many conference titles and curriculum documents: “The Future Is Now” or “Education for the 21st Century.” Gough (1990, 303) notes that “[w]hen one finds ‘the future’ (or a futures oriented reference) in the title of an educational document it usually means much less than might be expected.”

Finally, *taken-for-granted* futures are the most visible of the three. With this type, people appeal to one vision of the future rather than acknowledge its many potential paths and manifestations. We hear this view of the future when commentators declare that education must continue to serve the economy rather than the other way around. Or, again, that students require a

certain set of competencies in order to thrive in the future. In this taken-for-granted use, the future unfolds as more of the same that the speaker believes to be already the case. In all these three types, the future is ever present and never questioned as to its possible, probable and preferable manifestation. Fortunately, examples exist of more explicit engagements with the future.

“ Whilst these young people come across as quite pessimistic about the probable future, their visions of the preferable future are quite inspirational given that they also report little time spent on these issues in school.”

Hicks (2004, 170)

Futures Education

Australia in the '80s and '90s was a hotbed of research into young people's reasoning about the future. Findings from this body of research suggest that *despair* most accurately describes young Australians' reasoning about the future (den Heyer 2009a). For example, Hutchinson's (1996)

study found a stark difference between secondary students' vision of "probable" and "preferable" futures, the former expressed with words such as *divided, unsustainable, corrupt* and *violent*, and the latter with words such as *demilitarized, green, peaceful* and *equity*. To summarize his study of Australian 15- to 24-year-olds, Eckersley (1999, 77) writes that "the future most Australians want is neither the future they expect, nor the future they are promised. Most do not expect life in Australia to be better in 2010. They see a society driven by greed; they want one motivated by generosity." Examining this research, Hicks (2004, 170) importantly notes that "whilst these young people come across as quite pessimistic about the probable future, their visions of the preferable future are quite inspirational given that they also report little time spent on these issues in school."

In Alberta, programs of study include a futures dimension. For example, the high school front matter of the program of social studies grounds the subject in "learning opportunities for students to develop skills ... and the capacity to inquire, make reasoned and informed judgments, and arrive at decisions for the public good" (Alberta Education 2005, 5). On the same page, the program calls for "students to become engaged and involved in their communities by listening to and collaborating and working with others to design the future" and "creating new ways to solve problems." On the following page, the program hopes to have "students [strive] to understand and explain the world in the present and to determine what kind of world they want in the future." As noted by Hicks above, the lack of school time to explicitly engage future probabilities, however, likely continues here in Alberta and elsewhere in North America.

My review of educational research, in both teacher education and subject-specific areas, finds that there is an absence of the future as an explicit topic of research. In addition, discussions reported below with practising Alberta high school teachers confirm what the Australian scholar Debra Bateman found in her case study. Despite government, curriculum and even school mission statements declaring a commitment to preparing students for the future, "prior to the commencement of this study, the teachers had given little thought to the ways in which they 'educate for the future'" (Bateman 2012, 15). Rather, teachers assumed the "future would just occur" (Bateman 2012, 18). I turn now to explore the case for explicitly taking up the future in schools.

The Future Dimension in Everyday Thinking

A future dimension along with the present and past inheres in everyday deliberation. Social psychologists Emirbayer and Mische (1998) detail three entwined "chords" at play in human thinking and arriving at a judgment: reiteration, evaluation and projectivity. For example, if asked where I would like to go on vacation, I call on my past experience (the chord of reiteration) to evaluate the present options in light of the future probable and preferable outcomes (the chord of projectivity). In fact, I can clarify the present evaluation of options and my preferable projected outcome—where I might want to go or might want to do—only by attending to each of these time dimensions or chords.

" Historical thinking is a process whereby students are challenged to rethink assumptions about the past and to re-imagine both the present and the future."

(Alberta Education 2005, 9)

As I move from one to the other chord, or imagine them concurrently, overlapping, the value of one or another vacation option becomes clearer in light of my also emerging preferred vacation.

We also play these chords when we deliberate with others over an explicitly political question that requires collective action. For example, we cannot socially evaluate the present without also thinking concurrently about a past we can reference (or, rather, we reiterate our historical knowledge about such) in light of projected possible, probable and preferable futures. We go to our histories with a question seeking counsel for an orientation in the present as we face choices that define futures. To exclude a futures dimension in education, therefore, not only limits students' evaluation of their present social lives, but also their judgments about how the past they encounter in and out of schools informs present social choices and future preferable destinations. Questioning the past with an eye to the future is a key reason that Alberta's program of social studies includes a specific definition of historical thinking: "historical thinking is a process whereby students are challenged to rethink assumptions about the past and to re-imagine both the present and the future" (Alberta Education 2005, 9). The pedagogical necessity to do this well requires that we identify what questions give purpose to rethinking assumptions and reimagining our present and futures.

The Role of Futures in Scholarship

Cronon (1992) examines the books of two US historians published in the same year, 1979. These historians "dealt with virtually the same subject" and "had researched many of the same documents, and agreed on most of their facts, and yet their conclusions could hardly have been more different" (Cronon 1992, 1,347).

Taking quotations from the two books these prominent historians wrote and summarizing their findings, Cronon illustrates his argument that every historical narrative constitutes a value-laden creation:

In the final analysis, the story of the dust bowl was the story of people, people with ability and talent, people with resourcefulness, fortitude, and courage ... They were builders of tomorrow ... Because [of] those determined people ... the nation today enjoys a better standard of living. (Bonnifield, in Cronon 1992, 1,348)

The Dust Bowl was the darkest moment in the twentieth-century life of the southern plains ... The Dust Bowl was the inevitable outcome of a culture that deliberately, self-consciously, set itself the task of dominating and exploiting the land for all it was worth. (Worster, in Cronon 1992, 1,348)

How do two well-regarded historians dealing with the same archival sources and agreed-on facts come to such different conclusions?

The facts do not themselves contain the lessons these historians draw. Rather, each threads the facts together in narratives woven out of their present concerns that animate why they initially bothered to go to the archive: "In both cases the shape of the landscape conformed to the human narratives that were set within it and so became the terrain on which their different politics contested each other" (Cronon 1992, 1,362). These historical claims emerge as much from present concerns as they do from the past itself or the evidence by which we interpret it;

not just a present concern, but also a more or less explicit future toward which these historians might have hoped their work contributes. The lesson I draw here concerns the role that the future plays in learning quests—our hoped-for contributions to a preferred future for which we seek the past as counsel rather than a future that just occurs.

Current Events, Darkened Futures

Educators promote current events in science and social studies for a host of reasons. According to the Alberta program of social studies, “ongoing reference to current affairs adds relevance, interest and immediacy to social studies issues” (Alberta Education 2005, 6). Some teachers believe that current events help distracted students caught up in the immediate world of social networking, and adolescence more generally, encounter the important news of the day. Others draw comparisons between a past and a current event or problem being studied to provide relevance to each. Others may use current events to promote media literacy and the multiple points of view through which we can interpret any one event or controversy involving science (eg, climate change). These are all good reasons. We do need to attend, however, to several limitations in the use of current events without attention to possible futures. These became apparent in my study investigating the ways science and social studies teachers link their subject-matter teaching with a futures dimension.

In this study, I conducted one-hour interviews with eight secondary teachers, asking them how they envisioned the role of futures in their subject matter teaching. A discourse analysis of interviews revealed emergent themes within each interview (each treated as a separate case study). These themes were then compared and contrasted across cases to reveal more comprehensive or inclusive themes (Limberg 2008). Another researcher verified the descriptive reasonableness of themes identified and supporting interview data.

For Mj, current events give the past, but not the future, relevance:

Mj (second-year social studies teacher): I was able to make the link between the Ukraine crisis and the French revolution thanks to a tidy [newspaper] article that someone wrote who said “just as in 1789 ...” Unfortunately people are dying in this revolution as well, but for me as a teacher I am always trying to make it relevant for my students. I mean these kids might find it [the past] boring, [so] why are we talking about this? So it is important to make those links.

Mj points to a common use of current events that all interviewees share. Lacking a futures dimension, however, this use of current events just as likely paints a picture of an already determined and unchanging present as much as the events’ analogous relevance.

One unexpected finding in this study was the extent to which the absence of a future dimension abandons students to a further sense of a deeply distressed present:

Bill (22 years teaching social studies): If there is discussion about future then it’s probably all doomsday stuff, you know all the glaciers will melt and we will all die of something bad. That is probably how the future is dealt with in social studies, in a fairly negative way. If I am teaching current events and trying to explain how the world ended up this way and why it will turn out in one way rather than another then there is a lot of negative. It is hard

sometimes. It is like a newspaper, you know, it's all bad news. There is a lot of bad news and maybe that is what we all collectively do in our classrooms.

Bill points to the possibility that while the content of a current event may change, the tone and depiction of a troubled present remain the same. This use of current events to explain “why [the world] will turn out one and not another way” forecloses both the future as a relatively open time-space and exploration of more hopeful possibilities, likely contributing to students' despair about preferable futures as noted in the Australian studies summarized above.

From this study, it seems that the future consists in these classrooms, at best, as a type of “what if?” musing:

KdH: Are you linking these events to future probabilities or future outcomes?

Mj: Just through discussion. We might talk about what does society look like if we do this or that. But it's only through informal discussion.

If the discussion doesn't lend itself to that question, I don't go there ... We try to make a wee bit of a connection to “what if?” and that's about as far as we go with the future.

Jyle speaks to the present difficulty of getting beyond this type of “what if?” musing:

KdH: Do you get students to consider the future probabilities of, say, racism that you mentioned as one of your concerns as both a citizen and teacher?

Jyle (an eight-year social studies teacher): No, not usually, because that is a much harder kind of idea to get to. Usually, in lieu of asking them to consider the future and where our choices could lead, I will give them an example of where we might be going. You know, like, “Are we going to continue down this path ... about how we classify each other?” It gives them a little to think about as they go forward.

For Martha, a 17-year social studies teacher, the future's horizon in her teaching extends only to the end of the school year:

Martha: We don't focus on the future. We focus on the now and the yesterday. That is far as I go. When I start with the kids on the 30th of January, guess what I'm focusing on? The 14th of June! Because that's when their diploma [exam] is.

Later in the interview, Martha observes that perhaps this emphasis needs to be expanded:

We do think about the future in a personal perspective, but so rarely do we think about it in a cognitive or political or historical perspective.

I read Martha's comment as speaking to our profession's emphasis on helping individual students to succeed that narrows possible foci on social futures. Of course, individual success is key, but such success requires a broadly considered social analysis:

Mj: This semester, I have former AP [advanced placement] kids. Their sense of the probable and preferable future is very different from the kids I taught last year. Like last year they [those students] are not going to university. They are going to work in trades or

restaurants but is that what they want for themselves, is that their preferable? I don't know, but they don't know anything different, right?

Kate's thought captures well these insights into both the paucity of explicit subject-matter futures and a cultural reflex to speak of the future in individualistic terms:

KdH: What role does the future play in your teaching?

Kate (eight years teaching secondary science): I've never thought to ask them about the future. I only thought to present information as it exists now and look at historical trends. The only time we talked about the future [was] to communicate that they're in it as the primary focus and I'm not. It has to be a torch passing. That's the only time.

In this way, we limit the future's unfolding to the potential horizon of the personal and individual, not a question requiring a collective analysis and shaping. Where, then, are student opportunities to connect content knowledge to futures more broadly and explicitly considered?

Scenario Reasoning

Given its lack of explicit and open investigation in teachers' classrooms, how might we promote and take up a futures dimension linked to subject matters? I will take the case of history, which many people think is about the past. This despite evidence noted by Cronon above that the past is only known through those histories we write or speak to convey some lesson for a hoped-for future.

Rather than directed to the past, historian David Staley (2002) argues that teachers could develop students' historical reasoning equally well by having them articulate future scenarios. Scenarios differ from predictions: "Where a prediction is a definitive statement about what will be, scenarios are heuristic narratives that explore alternative plausibilities of what might be" (Staley 2002, 78).

Staley invites us to consider the ways we might enhance historical thinking by exploring arguments about future probabilities. Our collective hope for a preferable rather than just a probable future requires that we extend our engagement with students beyond simply arriving at reasonable judgments about some past incident to include creativity and desirous imaginings animated by the study of future possibilities.

Our collective hope for a preferable rather than just a probable future requires that we extend our engagement with students beyond simply arriving at reasonable judgments about some past incident to include creativity and desirous imaginings animated by the study of future possibilities.

Like any disciplinary study, scenario work begins with clearly articulated questions that emerge out of a classroom, school or the community's pressing issues of concern, to which the Alberta program explicitly calls upon

teachers and students to attend. Such questions are “throughline” questions (den Heyer 2009b). I distinguish throughlines from essential questions. Wiggins and McTighe (2005, 342) define an essential question as “a question that lies at the heart of a subject or a curriculum ... and promotes inquiry and uncoverage of a subject.” Rather than questions at the heart of a subject, throughlines are provocative questions that call for ethical responses requiring multidisciplinary frames of analysis as found in social and science studies. Such questions might range from the more local to the more general, from “To what extent, if at all, will bullying continue in our school?” to “What is the future of the Arctic and of the Inuit people there in regards to land claims, hunting rights and sovereignty?” Or in studying the transfer of thought, fads, trends throughout history, “In what ways are thoughts and viruses alike?”

As defined most basically by science, viruses are packets of information. So too are memes, headlines and more sustained efforts to gather and nurture “synergies” in creative economies in livable places. Thus, we might ask in social studies, “Why Florence as a beginning to European learning from the Muslim and African world in the time period referred to as the Renaissance? What qualities would where we live need to express to be a Renaissance city?” (See Scott and Abbott 2012 for an example of junior high teaching organized around a similar question.)

After identifying their throughline questions, teachers and students scan the environment looking for what is called “driving forces” that are “key factors that will determine (or ‘drive’) the outcome of the scenario” (Staley 2002, 79). Here, “evidence” is identified in much the same way that historians work with artefacts from the past to explain events: “Like evidence from the past, evidence for the future is not intrinsically evident. It is made evidence by the historian’s mind acting upon it” (Staley 2002, 84). Sources of evidence include current events and a range of media in which teacher and students identify a driving force necessary to take into account in constructing scenarios. Here the past becomes meaningful both as (a) an indicator of past experiences and influences of driving forces and (b) differing interpretations of said driving forces and their plausible future outcomes. Of course, also considered are the unpredictable influences on the issue played by human agency, accident and uncontrollable environmental conditions.

Once a question has been identified, the present environment scanned for driving forces and historical content introduced by the teacher as potential analogies, students write the story of each scenario (Staley, in his review of the literature on scenario writing, suggests a minimum of three. I suggest *possible*, *probable* and *preferable* to emphasize the future’s malleability). Each scenario has a plot that “describes a different, but equally likely, logic of the future”: The narrative of each scenario does not claim that on this date this will happen.” Rather, the scenario is a description of the future context that has already come to be (Staley 2002, 84).

Once articulated, scenarios—and the historical interpretations used to support their plausibility—also provide opportunities for students to distinguish between probable and preferable futures. Such a discussion provides students practice with articulating their ethical commitments as agents of future social life.

Summation

A future dimension inheres in our everyday decisions and our more refined disciplinary judgments. Yet the future's presence in these deliberations likely lacks explicit attention in schools, as evinced by the absence of the question in North American educational scholarship and studies confirming that the future, while invoked by various official documents, remains unexamined. In my study with eight excellent practising secondary teachers, none thought to tie a student exploration of our collective futures to their subject matter. Rather, the future exists either as "what if?" musings or is limited to a concern for their students' personal work and academic outcomes.

Understandably, teachers feel pressed by teaching conditions to trace a path from the past to present or explain analogous realities between the two. In doing so, we also likely convey an unintended message that the present inevitably followed a single path from that past, akin to the ways some speak of the "taken-for-granted" future as an already given. Absent a futures dimension, teachers' use of current events can reinforce students' already existing taken-for-granted pictures of "just the way it is/ as it has always been/will always be."

Current events are useful, of course, but perhaps less than we think without an explicit exploration of those currents in which these events flow between past, present and possible futures. Without such an exploration, perhaps the cumulative effect is to heap another event on the pile of "one damn thing after another" under which many students despair for their preferable visions of our shared social future.

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Alberta's New Story—More Than a Better Version of Yesterday

The problem is not that each society constructs itself as a story but that it forgets that it has done so.

—Richard Kearney, *On Stories*

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In the iconic book, *DeSchooling Society*, Ivan Illich (1971, 4) identifies several contradictions at the heart of our Euro-American story of progress that ought to be basic reading for any citizen:

Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence, and creative endeavor are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends....

Illich was a historian and a Roman Catholic priest who taught in and directed an English language school in Mexico for non-Spanish speaking missionaries who planned to preach in Latin America. He was also a prolific public intellectual whose work traced the ways that the necessities of social life—education, health, safety and conviviality—had been co-opted by institutions to justify their bureaucratic necessity. In effect, he argued, such institutions abrogate the creative energy from communities to animate their own self-perpetuation, thus stultifying the members of a community and their will to know themselves, their needs and their solutions. Illich offers another storyline: health, education, safety and conviviality are local affairs that require building local expertise rather than bureaucratic standardization and oversight.

This is neither a romantic nor a libertarian argument. Quite the opposite: Illich tells a story of how we become ourselves only through a public sphere rich in access, discussion and collective forms of action that *require public monies to be spent to create places out of spaces where publics may come to form*.

What Illich details—and what debates about education so often miss—is the psychosis engendered when we cling to old stories while trying to live well within new realities. Alberta's previous story based on narrowly defined accountabilities and bureaucratic surveillance of school learning served some purposes. But it is time for Alberta to move back to our convivial and deeply democratic historical roots, a place where schools were the hub and pride of community.

This was Alberta's story that emerged in the progressive era of the 1930s and one that Peter Lougheed energized in the 1970s. Yet this was a story that was pushed aside by the mid-1990s as the reforms of the Ralph Klein era took hold. Schools were now the government's, not the communities'. Then as now, some parties that form government see no contradiction in arguing that the private market and the profit motive should deliver public goods, like health and education.

So it is today with stories we continue to tell about economics premised on endless growth and half-circle accounting (ie, “externalities” such as pollution have not been accounted for in business plans as a cost of doing business). Stories about how we live in a democracy while we daily face the subservience of our representative politics to global financial capital, and, in education, the sophistic common sense to speak of students as economic tools for global competitiveness. So common that people don’t—when they should—even choke on their words.

We need to help ourselves and our government to counter the present dearth of any language, any imagination, or perhaps any contemporary public capacity for a story whose actors are not *Homo-Economus* indulging in sophistic self-interest. Taken from a slightly different angle, Dewey asks a question we still need to address:

On the side of the machinery of school-work, I mention first the number of children in a room. This runs in the graded schools of our country anywhere from 35–60....Under such circumstances, how do we have the face to continue to speak at all of the complete development of the individual as the supreme end of educational effort? (Dewey 2001, 394)

We can arrive at a mainlined version of this culture story about economics, politics and schooling through analogy. To justify our necessarily nettlesome enterprise of K–12 schools, we need to teach birds to fly.

Learning to Fly—Flying to Learn

Let us put all the young birds into a cage and then explain to them how to fly. We will break down this process into consumable chunks and then test their consumption according to a schedule inherited from the Agrarian Age. At the end of this, students will be accredited to fly. Or, let us innovate; design lessons differently and justify our reasoning on the grounds that either the young, disciplinary communities or the social order needs it to be so. Thus “progressives” and “conservatives” engage in education debate:

And, by the time [the progressive’s] ideals and theories had been translated over into their working equivalents in the curriculum, the difference between them and what he as a conservative really wished and practiced became often the simple difference of tweedle dum from tweedle dee. So, the “great big battle” was fought with mutual satisfaction, each side having an almost complete victory in its own field. (Dewey 2001, 388)

We also might debate where these young ought to fly someday.

Within this frame, however, the cage remains a given in which “[a]lmost of necessity... personal appropriation, assimilation and expression is incidental and superficial” (Dewey 2001, 395). Anyone questioning the necessity of the cage is likely to be deemed crazy. The people convinced that the young birds will never learn to fly without their directives are sophist bureaucrats or ideologues in various institutional guises (den Heyer, 2009c).

As I learn from Illich, regardless of what curriculum emerges from the school debate a tragic school lesson is being learned. The risk is this.

Within the cage, each young person will come to believe some version of the following: that my will to attend to the infinite learning possibilities that life presents is of no consequence; that I must have others explain to me what I should know; that I cannot claim to know unless I reproduce what was explained to me in a standardized form. This is the logic that must be accepted, acquiesced to or forced from the populace by all forms of enforced state schooling that conflate learning with accreditation:

Once [process and substance] become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. (Illich 1971, 4)

What to Do?

We can begin by asking different questions. A good resource in this regard is the ATA’s *Renewing Alberta’s Promise: A Great School for All* (2015). This document brings together leading international research on curriculum, schooling and change, and lays out a set of necessary and visionary questions to which we must respond if we are to tell nourishing stories that approximate where and when we are today. This document acknowledges that we cannot meaningfully reform any part of the education system without deciding to leave the cage that we have grown accustomed to: Is it not we who build this cage?

Assessment—surely one of the most contested areas of education policy in Alberta—provides an example of our need to re-story ourselves. Rather than standardized testing, a very 20th-century idea supposedly necessary for 21st-century competitiveness, we might recall the late Stanford University scholar Elliot Eisner and his work on educational “connoisseurship.”

As I understand his work, Eisner asks, if we needed advice on which piece of art we should spend our inheritance on, how would we know someone is an expert whose judgment we should trust? We would assume that we could trust someone’s judgment who has a history evaluating works in their area of growing expertise; we would expect that they could publically explain and justify different criteria for their judgments and why one criterion in specific cases matters more than in another case; we would expect a capacity to offer comparative judged value, and, finally we should expect that a connoisseur makes judgments objectively, that is independent of any other consideration other than the task given and the need for informed judgment.

With standardized exams, the only people who can enhance their connoisseurship are the test makers and graders, a very small elite discussing a relatively small factor in what impacts students’ “real world” success compared to healthy communities, involved parents, meaningful forms of assessment through which students might take pride in their work.

As outlined in *Renewing Alberta’s Promise: A Great School for All* (2015), we have material to craft alternative narratives about schools and education. Ministry initiatives over the last several years also provide material to reimagine such. While it might appear like a grain of sand working its way free from the middle of an iceberg, a fresh, nourishing and bolder Alberta story for education is emerging.

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Kent den Heyer earned his PhD in curriculum studies from the University of British Columbia, MA from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, BEd from Mount Allison University, and BA (history and philosophy) from Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. At UBC, he worked in the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness dedicated to research into the intersections of collective memory, history education, social psychology and media studies, and at the Canadian federally funded Public Knowledge Project seeking to enhance the scholarly and public quality of academic research through innovative online environments.

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He has published and presented research internationally on student and teacher interpretations of the conditions necessary for social change, psychoanalytic approaches to antiracist education and curriculum theory. His future work now in progress examines possible educational implications in the work of the French philosopher Alain Badiou, the role of literature in historical consciousness, investigating and initiating mechanism to contest the commercialization of public education, disutopian visions of education, and the life work of R Buckminster Fuller.



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