

# Curriculum and International Democracy

## A Vital Source of Synergy and Change

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**I**N THE 1960s, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of the “fierce urgency of now.” Half a century later his words continue to resonate as the world reels from crises in hunger, democracy, health care, and social justice. Deregulated international trade and monetary policies allow goods and services to move freely and smoothly across borders, while blocking impoverished people at the same borders. Perhaps ironically, the very structures of international financial deregulation, allowing transnational banks, insurance companies, and corporations to write their own rules, have created possibilities of “global economic meltdown.” In response to these vast transnational financial arrangements, however, people around the globe are participating in local grass-roots democracy with international implications. For example, Women in Northern Mexico are successfully suing egregious North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) polluters, and Arabs and Jews are forming peace schools in Israel.

At the same time in the United States, it would be difficult to find a greater disconnect between the narrowly defined representations of life found in public school curricula and the revolutions in participatory democracy, dialogic interaction, and perceptions of the multiplicity of identity taking place on local, national, and international levels. When students in the U.S. learn about international relations, they often encounter triumphalist or sentimental rhetoric that masks self-serving action. As young people around the globe are involved in international hyper-textual environments, students in public schools in the U.S. are increasingly experiencing a scripted, decontextualized, and test-driven curriculum focused more on mathematics and science and less on grounded democratic perspectives and civic participation (Westheimer, 2008). This curriculum often presents, with a level of certainty, an uncontested national narrative in which democracy is conflated with capitalism (Beyer & Apple, 1998).

As an educator in the United States, I recently experienced this clash between the complex and the contained when I took a trip to Mexico with 24 other educators from North America. This trip, partly sponsored by Rethinking Schools, allowed us to meet a range of people whose lives had been deeply affected by NAFTA. I personally went on the trip to compare my own perspectives of international democracy and NAFTA to those of people we met in Mexico. I found that many of my own views of democracy, gained by my growing up and being educated

by public schools in the United States, were in contrast to the more internationally framed views of democracy that I found in Mexico. The trip brought home to me a persistent question: How do you begin to imagine new possibilities for international democracy when they go beyond the form that you know and have lived (Moyn, 2008)? Even when educators and students wish to study changes in how people can collectively work together across borders to promote democracy, we are severely challenged by our perceptions of our personal and national narratives (Sawyer & Laguardia, in press).

In this paper I approach this question from a curriculum perspective. Framed by my vantage point as an educator from the United States, I use a kaleidoscope—which presents a new vision of something from the intersecting reflections of three images—as a metaphor for a narrative and transformative curriculum and examine aspects of the relationship between curriculum and international democratic education.

As examples of a transformative curricular process, I present an image of border artwork and two mini-narratives of people we met in Mexico. These stories and images represent examples of both grounded democracy-in-action as well as a framing for international democracy. I offer these narratives as a context for analysis of both how national narratives are being reshaped in transnational ways and how curriculum can “promote the critical study of diverse groups of people” (Pinar, 2005, p. 4). Central to this process is the additional need for people who are socialized in Western countries to critically study personal and national narratives. I suggest that the rapid pace of global change places a special responsibility on curriculum workers to reframe curriculum (and curriculum studies) around issues of international social justice and democracy.

### Dialogic Curriculum: A Kaleidoscope of Possibilities

Bakhtin (1981) writes that the novel is the most flexible and open genre in writing, as novels incorporate every form of written language. There is an additional layer based on text form and genre (e.g., narration versus dialogue versus document). Furthermore, as a reader reads a text, she adds her own interpretation—her own poetry—to a particular reading, transacting with the text and creating a new text (Rosenblatt, 1994). Curriculum studies as well as enacted curriculum generate a context nearly as rich, layered, and synergistic as that found in the novel. As an interdisciplinary and critical study, curriculum studies conceptualizes curriculum as a complicated conversation, is dedicated to understanding, and emphasizes “interdisciplinary configurations such as African American studies, women’s and gender studies, and cultural studies” (Pinar, 2005, p. 4). Unlike literature, though, curriculum is lived collectively. It gives people the opportunity to compose, decompose, and recompose the seemingly locked-in story lines of their cultural lives. Curriculum can create a space to allow the nearly impossible to happen: It can let people investigate how their personal narratives are situated in relation to other narratives, allowing for a recreation of these narratives.

A kaleidoscope presents a helpful image for the conceptual framework about how curriculum can provide a necessary location in support of change for international democratic education. A kaleidoscope has three mirrored interior sides. When light enters from the outside it cannot pass through these sides. Instead, it bounces—reflects—against them at right angles. As the light intersects, it creates a dynamic of reflection plus reflection plus reflection. This process creates the kaleidoscopic picture, a jingle jangle of shifting and overlapping images. The particular kaleidoscopic images are situational and flexible. For this discussion, the three sides could

include post-NAFTA stories and art, personal and national narratives, and a conception of international democratic education. Viewing the kaleidoscopic reflection as a dialogic relationship, these three sides create a new text—and a new perception of international democratic education.

As a way to critique personal and national narratives in support of international democratic education, the curricular concepts of *currere* (Pinar, 1975) and duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2004) are helpful. *Currere* is a critical form of autobiography and an area of curriculum studies that examines the curriculum of everyday life. It is the process of the examination of various dialectical relationships in one's life. In *currere*, the critical examination process unfolds as a regressive, progressive, analytic and synthetic endeavor, recognizing that conceptualization is transtemporal and changes over time (Norris, 2008). This form of self-study, then, can be regarded as a looking back to make new meanings of previous experiences and conceptions—in relation to a specific thematic focus. This process of awareness in tracking how one comes to believe something leads to a change in those beliefs.

Drawing from the work of Bakhtin (1981), Pinar (1975), and others, including Norris and Sawyer (2004), duoethnography is a curricular research process by which researchers and educators can work collaboratively to generate dialogue focused on personally meaningful questions, issues, and constructs. In duoethnography, two or more researchers work in tandem to critically juxtapose stories from their lives in relation to a similar phenomenon, creating a process of interrogation—not reification—of personal critical sites or socially relevant issues, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. Employing Oberg and Wilson's (2002) adage that researchers who use the autobiographical method should be the site, not the topic, of their research, duoethnographers engage in acts of analytic excavation as they chart the temporal, social, cultural, and geographical cartography of their lives. They seek to discover and explore their mutual gray zones and in-between locations as intertwined intersections, not as binary relationships. Ultimately, researchers explore the overall duoethnographic process as a way to restory their narrative perception of a particular topic or theme.

## Contradictions of Democracy

One topic open to multiple definitions is the concept of democracy. How people define it frames their views of it. One interpretation of it centers on free elections, adult suffrage, and the secret ballot (Bahmueller, 1997). Broader interpretations include “citizens’ informed engagement in civic and political life” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003, p. 9) that “values active engagement with democratic institutions, dialogues among citizens with divergent perspectives, and ongoing public analysis and reappraisal of laws and social norms” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2003, p. 10). Parkison (2005) further suggests that a view of democracy ought to include a critique of individual and group identity. Honest critique of self-and-group affiliations in relation to levels of entitlement of democratic processes and spaces contribute to a broader view of democracy (Parkison, 2005; Stanley, 2003).

Growing up in the United States, I participated in a national narrative of democracy. Said (1993) discusses this notion of a national narrative: “Nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them...” (pp. xii–

xiii). He continues, “We are still the inheritors of that style by which one is defined by the nation, which in turn derives its authority from a supposedly unbroken tradition...” (p. xxv).

In the United States, a national narrative, often referred to as a meta-narrative, of democracy is explicitly or implicitly linked with the logic of conquest. These conquests, as Marable (2007) states, are “over indigenous people, over frontiers, over boundaries and borders, over vast stretches of geography, and even over space itself” (pp. 1–2). He continues,

Embedded in that conquest is a set of ideas about individual liberty, the ownership of private property, and certain restrictions on the authority and power of the central government over personal activity. The history that is generally codified in classroom textbooks and sets the boundaries of civic discourse emphasizes the character of the American experience as both ‘exceptional’ and ‘unique,’ but also ‘universal,’ in the sense that our history’s underlying core democratic values can be transported and adopted by other peoples to distant lands, thereby enhancing the quality of their lives. To become ‘American’ is to accept the legitimacy of this master narrative. (Marable, 2007, pp. 1–2)

The U.S. history of profit and cultural and physical subjugation of others is subsumed by a national narrative of abstract ideals about freedom, liberty, and self-determination.

In the United States, we use our national narrative as a conceptual framework for the interpretation of past, present, and future events. As symbolized by the Statue of Liberty, the mainstream story of U.S. democracy portrays individuals fighting for self-liberty and collective representation, having the freedom to worship (or not to worship) a religion of choice, and trusting in a process grounded in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Informed by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, individuals and collective groups struggled for taxation with representation, universal suffrage, and increased civil liberties and freedoms. But rarely has the discourse about U.S. democracy examined how resistance (often democratic resistance) has developed in the U.S. in response to exclusion and oppression. And rarely has there been a critique of how some of these narratives of resistance remain a counterpoint to the national narrative while others become appropriated by it, lost in a unitary, linear and abstract story line.

While the content of democracy has grown in the U.S. (what we vote for), the form of democracy has been constricted. Market democracy (Barber, 1992) (the media manipulation of democracy), huge election budgets, lobbyist-drafted regulation, voter suppression, and election fraud are part of the back-story. As mentioned earlier, the meaning of democracy has been further redefined by a conflation between it and capitalism (Beyer & Apple, 1998), with freedom becoming the freedom of the marketplace. Democracy’s promotion of the common good is replaced by capitalism’s promotion of profit.

Thus justified by a national narrative for a “Manifest Destiny” to promote freedom and democracy at home and abroad, the U.S. narrative of democracy became a self-granted license for expansion. For me, the issue of the U.S. transporting its meta-narrative about “core democratic values to distant lands” is twofold. First, it is another form of colonialism. Colonialism is “the physical and psychic occupation and control of a people, a place, a person—[which] happens at the individual and systemic levels” (Asher, Sawyer, & Walker, 2006, p. 1). Democracy ultimately is an act of expression of people working together within specific contexts. For it to be meaningful, it needs to be grounded and contextualized. Packaged democracy, in contrast, imposed by one country on another (regardless of intentions), is a cultural act of domination. It seemingly

takes values and meanings from one country and attempts to implant them as foundations for individual and collective actions in another country.

And secondly, I would suggest that exported democracy can easily become “market democracy,” supporting a corporate power-grab wrapped in beautiful abstractions. When democracy is exported to foreign countries, its democracy/capitalism conflation is quite often starkly apparent. The export of U.S. democracy often becomes an act of imperialism, underscored by a conquest mentality and a desire for profits (labor, resources, commercial culture).

Significantly, against this backdrop of the export of U.S. democracy, there has been an upsurge in collective action by poor and middle-class people around the world to promote human rights and democracy. This action is seen, for example, in Maclovio Rojas, a squatters’ village of over 10,000 inhabitants (Sainz, 2008). Fighting an international corporate take-over of their land, inhabitants of Maclovio Rojas have democratically elected their major, established a school and medical clinic, and constructed a website linking it to the rest of the world. This collective action is also found in the work of *Via Campesina* (Peasant’s Path), a movement of farmers networking internationally (Bello, 2008) for international social justice and democracy. And it is found in the installations of Mexican border artists. These artists work, in the words of Becker (1994) describing subversive art more generally, along “points of intersection where identities converge to form new syntheses and new continents of philosophical thought” (p. xvii). The work of these artists, as I will examine later in this paper, “appears rooted in social reality, that does not mean it is a reflection of it. It does not reflect that reality but calls it into question by depicting it rent, divided against itself, it turns it into a problem” (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1990, quoted in Becker, 1994, p. xiii).

The actions of all these people conflict both with NAFTA, which is inherently antidemocratic, and with exported market democracy, with its focus more on resource removal than on the establishment of authentic local governance. It is on a larger, more international and often technologically enhanced level that these new narratives of resistance pose a threat to the conquest mentality inherent in the exported U.S. meta-narrative. These artists, villagers, and farmers are attempting to reclaim democracy by regulating (and democratizing) deregulated transnational corporations and by transcending aspects of market democracy exported from the United States.

## International Democratic Education

Democratic education as a topic in U.S. education is culturally and historically situated. Many of the early efforts in support of democratic education still frame our work today. John Dewey (1916) is considered by many to be the founder of democratic education in the United States. Dewey (1959) contributed to a democratic tradition in the United States by viewing education as an experiential process for and through democratic means.

Since Dewey, views of democratic education have frequently been a response to social conditions (Sawyer & Pearl, 2002). In the 1930s, in response to the Great Depression, the efforts to transform schools were paraded as “democratic.” The advent of McCarthyism after World War II led to the purging of teachers, the banishing of textbooks, and the uprooting of progressive education, effectively closing that chapter of democratic education. With the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, a range of programs and proposals were initiated. What made this epoch democratic was the commitment to equality (Bastian, Fruchter, Gittell, Greer, & Haskins, 1986; Sawyer & Pearl, 2002). A number of contemporary educators discuss democratic education as



preparation for democratic citizenship and/or emancipating students from the oppressiveness of racism, sexism, and classism (e.g., Apple, 1993; Apple & Beane, 1995; Barber, 1992; Goodlad, 1996; Gutmann, 1999; Tarrant, 1989; Wood, 1988).

I would now argue that given the global interconnection of political-and-environmental contexts, notions of democracy should be framed by a global perspective. We have reached a critical point on this planet where the increase in global transnational corporations (as we know them now) are promoting the wholesale dismantling of democracies on the national level, creating huge displacements of increasingly desperate people, and causing food and environmental catastrophes that cannot be ignored. It is critical for educators of all stripes to begin to understand how their work is situated in these broader global issues.

And indeed, educators have begun to examine the international contexts of democracy, often in relation to the concept of social justice. As Enslin (2006) states in referring to the work of Young (1990), “social justice means the elimination of institutionalised [sic] domination and oppression” (Young, 1990, p. 34, as quoted in Enslin, 2005, p. 58). Additional characteristics of international social justice for education include the opportunity and capacity for all to engage in self-development and self-determination, the role of education in the division of labor, and the critique of oppression within cultural difference (Enslin, 2006, p. 59).

Asher (2007) reminds us, however, that people who have grown up in imperialistic countries, such as the U.S., are inevitably implicated in their ongoing projects of colonialism, social and environmental injustice, and health and education inequities. And it is in the intersections of these interwoven and symbiotic narratives (personal, national, international) that the promise of a curriculum of international democracy resides. I would suggest though, that a larger and richer notion of curriculum found in curriculum theory can play an important role in the study of international democracy. A dynamic curriculum of self-critique in relation to the national narrative can help us to begin to perceive how, as mentioned earlier, “the opportunity and capacity for all to engage in self-development and self-determination” is deeply challenging to people socialized in the U.S.

To bring about a beginning of international democratic education, we must first allow people in other nations to define their own views of democracy, and to do this, we must first experience an active process of postcolonialism (or decolonialism?), a reconceptualization of our personal and national narratives. As part of this process of reconceptualization, the following stories of and about NAFTA offer a frame and a dynamic for a curriculum of international democratic education.

### Stories of and About NAFTA

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) threatens national and international democracy. Inaugurated on January 1, 1994, NAFTA was introduced with considerable fanfare for prospects of North American prosperity. This agreement removed most barriers to trade and investment among the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Under NAFTA, all non-tariff barriers to agricultural and much industrial trade between the United States and Mexico were eliminated. As Finnegan states, “Sometimes known as... ‘free trade,’ this gospel has been the main American ideological export since anti-Communism.... Its core tenets are deregulation, privatization, ‘openness’ (to foreign investment, to imports), unrestricted movement of capital, and lower taxes” (pp. 41–42). While the border may have been removed for the free flow of goods and

services, the movement of citizens and workers among the different countries remains restricted. Thus, NAFTA freedom supports trade, not people and material rights, not human rights.

In conjunction with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies from the 1980s, NAFTA has not lived up to its promise of prosperity for all (Bello, 2008). Since 1995, approximately two million Mexican farmers have been displaced from their farms, losing their traditional homes, livelihood, and often social/kinship networks (not to mention spiritual roots and traditions), leading to a process of “depeasantization.” Many of these displaced workers have traveled to northern Mexico, to seek work in the *maquiladoras*, duty-free factories and assembly plants located primarily along the border with the United States. Between 2000 and 2005 alone, there was a net loss of about 900,000 rural jobs and 700,000 industry jobs in Mexico (Phillips, 2009).

Within this context of displaced people and cheap labor, many *maquiladoras* are now being dismantled and exported to Asia, as transnational corporations have discovered that they can produce and assemble goods more cheaply there. This dynamic of competition among countries for increasingly lower paying jobs gives transnational corporations increased leverage to demand wage and labor concessions where they do operate (or wish to operate), leading to a “race to the bottom” (Roberts & Thanos, 2003). In addition to losses of home and livelihood, NAFTA has also led to systemic disenfranchisement, as NAFTA regulations preempt local laws. Deregulated transnational corporations operate outside national regulations and the democratic will of people. This dynamic has promoted a systemic exclusion of much of the population from large-scale decision making. While corporations have benefited greatly from NAFTA, their profits have come at an expense to poorer workers, the environment, and democracy. Is it any surprise that, given levels of desperation and poverty, many Mexican workers head north of the border to try to improve their and their families’ lives?

The following section of the paper presents examples of artwork my group and I saw and the stories of a few people we met on our trip.

### *(De)Constructing Borders*

On the first day of our trip in Tijuana, we met a small collective of artists at a community house. The artists had been working on an art installation on the Tijuana side of the border, which they asked us to see. Deviating from our original trip plan by going to see this installation, we found it set against a backdrop of barbed wire, klieg lights, and observation towers on the opposite side of the wall. This detour highlighted Gomez-Pena’s (1996) notion that the “work of the artist is to force open the matrix of reality to introduce unsuspected possibilities” (p. 7), to become “open to aspects [of life] that might startle [us] into reconsidering what it means to be human” (Wineburg, 2001, p. 17).

The installation, attached to the corrugated metal wall for over a mile, consisted of a series of paintings and life-size coffins. Placed vertically, the coffins were painted with deep blues, pinks, oranges, reds, and yellows. Many of them displayed a crucifix and a name of a person who had died trying to cross into the United States.

An example of a particular painting is presented below.



(Photo: On the Tijuana Side of the Mexican-U.S. Border)

What do you see in the photo? As you examine it, try to articulate the different meanings of images and texts. What are they individually? How do they work together? What do they tell us about larger issues of colonialism? What do they tell us about ourselves?

I see an interplay between text and image, and image and image. The words “Coca Cola” appear against a red backdrop and are crossed out. A line points from them to the words “coca killer,” shown as a label on a soda bottle, against a white backdrop. Is there a double coding between a commercial image—a symbol of capitalism (a bottle of Coca Cola)—and a violent political image (“coca killer”)? The similarity in word sound (“cola” and “killer”) underscores a connection. This connection on a literal level is not so far-fetched in that originally the soft drink did include addictive ingredients. The additional text, “*aresina sindicalistas*,” translates roughly into English as murdering workers’ unions. These words are framed by a backdrop of the Columbian flag, a yellow-blue-red triptych (an echo of the Mexican flag?). On the actual Mexican flag, red represents blood spilled in forging national unity. White on the Mexican flag represents purity and Catholicism. This is a clever word play, but it also creates a double coding of capitalism and murder, possibly within a religious context when bordering art pieces are brought in. These word plays and mixed associations invite dual coding. This coding also creates a sense of tension between the concepts of capitalism and democracy. The images ultimately refer to identity, though, not only the artists’ but also other people impacted by colonialism. Add the images of the crucifixes in the bordering pieces, and then there is the further contrast of life and death. These particular images can be seen as nested within each other, with life in death (e.g., the religious connotations and the artistic representations) and death in life (e.g., poverty, genocide). Other photos show images of life and death and people—often outlined with a dot or pointillist technique—protesting. The pointillist outlines present a further reference to Catholic art, whose religious images are often framed through a pointillist technique (e.g., halos). In all the images, there is the suggestion that at this time and place, cultures are shifting and identities are layered, hybrid, crossing literal and figurative borders.

Interpretations of this photo can be different (Please see my notes for another interpretation from a reviewer for an earlier draft of this manuscript.),<sup>1</sup> but the impacts of colonialism can be seen clearly. The artist that I talked to mentioned that these images were more than a statement about U.S. immigration policy. He mentioned that the various artists in the project sought to create a space within and around art for dialogue about the role of free trade and corporate



globalization on the lives of people around the world. Placing the death of people crossing the border into a global-political context, he told me that the border art was not just about the U.S. and Mexico but also about the past and the future, restricted people and unrestricted goods, impoverished people and entitled people, open dialogue and scripted answers, emergent thoughts and decided responses. He asked us to consider using the art as a lens for personal, national, and international critique, to examine the role of the U.S. in NAFTA and the impact of NAFTA on specific lives and culture. This process then becomes the examination of art as postcolonial art, as artistic work engaged in “the radical reassessment of center-periphery relations” and “rethinking the sharp, binary distinction between ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’” (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 3).

Viewing these images, I ask myself a few questions: How I was situated in relation to the tensions within the painting? How do the images interact with my stories of the United States and of democracy? How do they connect to my story of free trade? This image suggests that border art is

left contingent, partial, wonderfully open and incomplete for the reader to develop and to realize, to be compelled to read what they have never done so, to look at pictures that have never seen, to attend to music they have heard only in the distance if at all. (Greene, 2001, p. viii)

This process of realization springs from a dialogue with the artwork. In terms of *currere*, it promotes a kaleidoscopic critique of my curriculum of self and democracy, nested in the past, present, and future. It is a realization of change.

As an experiment, I had one of my own classes of graduate students in education examine the art discussed in this paper within the context of our own *currere*—by creating short duo-ethnographic writings. The members of the class examined photographs of Mexican art as well as border photographs taken from both the Mexican and the United States sides of the border. The United States side showed either images of intimidation (barbed wire, guard towers, open and exposed fields, or images of clean, unmarked, and seemingly untouchable expanses of wall.

In their initial discussions of the art, the students surfaced different tensions about the artists’ intentions and the “meanings” of the pieces. Some people in the class thought that the artists were attempting to engage the viewer in a complex dialogue about colonialism but in ways that didn’t initially directly connect with the United States. A couple of other people in the class thought that the artists were engaged in a simple act of propaganda. Another tension arose in terms of the meaning of the pieces. Some people thought that the art acted as a “stop” sign, warning people to resist border crossings; whereas others thought that it was intended to engage dialogue around immigration. These areas of disagreement were entry points for the class to critique and explore their own views within a new and larger frame about colonialism and international democracy and our relationship to it. The students then wrote short duoethnographies in which they explored some of the meanings we generated in relation to their lives.

As my students and I constructed our duoethnographies, we found that we first needed to rise above our own clichés and patterned ways of seeing as we considered this complex topic. This process actually promoted an initial process of cognitive dissonance among some members of the class. We then began to examine and discuss different meanings in the art. The students brainstormed specific examples of how this art impacted them and then offered a few thoughts. First, they were surprised that Mexican art could be political. Instead of being just decorative,

this art actively communicated a political message to the viewer. This was a message calling people not to be resigned to the deaths occurring as people tried to cross borders. Interestingly, these borders held multiple meanings: the oppressor and the oppressed, capitalism and democracy, life and death, agency and despair. Furthermore, the students in my class were transformed by viewing Mexican political border art. They were engaged in an aesthetic dialogue with these artistic representations of agency, death, hope, and democracy. And through this dialogue, they changed some of their fundamental views of people and democracy.

### *Lived Democracy and NAFTA: The Local in the Global, the Global in the Local*

On the second day of our trip, my group and I visited Colonia Chilpancingo, a workers' village located down the hill from a car-and-boat battery recycling plant. Through an interpreter, a few members of this village told us some of their stories. The plant, *Metales y Derivados*, was started in the 1970s by a businessman from San Diego. It was forced to close in 1994. Over the years, the businessman's company had trucked thousands of used batteries from California. At the plant they would open the batteries to extract the lead, mold it into bricks, and ship it back to the U.S. In the process, they scattered up to 8,500 tons of carcinogenic battery toxins—arsenic, lead, cadmium, antimony—over the hillside. The toxins had seeped into the ground and flowed into the small stream running through the village. Once clean, this stream was thoroughly polluted. We saw two young children fishing on its bank. In times of flooding, the river would rise a foot or two and seep into houses. The villagers mentioned that the incidence of miscarriages and birth defects rose dramatically in the last decade since the factory was open. Since then, many babies have been born with anencephaly, a fatal defect in which babies have little or no brain. Other children have developed cancer.

Part of this story is also about personal-and-collective action and agency. The people in the village, primarily the women, organized themselves and took legal action against *Metales y Derivados* and NAFTA. Their case eventually went to the Mexican Supreme Court, where they won an initial settlement of \$800,000. This amount is approximately one-tenth of the total amount needed to effectively clean up the site, but they feel hopeful that they will ultimately return the land to its earlier clean condition.

We then went to Casa del Migrante (House of the Immigrant). Opened in 1992, Casa del Migrante is part of a network of six shelters in Mexico and Guatemala, which were founded by an Italian order of priests whose mission is to serve “people on the move,” including immigrants, refugees and other displaced persons. It offers 15 days of food and shelter, clothing, personal supplies, medical care, and human rights advice. There is room for 180 men. To date, the Casa has served 136,000 people. There is a similar shelter for women and children in the vicinity.

The Casa del Migrante created a sense of humanity at the crossroads of migration, cultural displacement, and global change. The actual physical structure was basic and beautiful. A three-story building constructed around an inner courtyard, its walls were white-washed. Aqua-blue, wrought-iron railings lined the four inside walls of the upper floors, with flowers in baskets falling over the sides. Often in the U.S., halfway houses are not fully integrated into or even accepted by their neighborhoods. The Casa's community, however, embraced it. For the past 17 years, 45 older women who live in the surrounding area each volunteered to work at the Casa one day a week. On their volunteer day, they talk to the men, most of whom have just been deported from the United States, cook for them, and try to reconnect them to life in Mexico.

One of the men we met was Miguel. He had immigrated illegally to southern California about 15 years ago and had been working construction jobs during that time. He was recently apprehended in a border patrol sweep and deported. Knowledgeable and concerned about the role the United States was playing in international relations, he was on his way back home to Sinaloa, having decided “no more U.S. for me.” He was not optimistic about job prospects back home. The men we met described how vast numbers of people within their country are moving—being dislocated—from the agrarian South to the more industrial North. They mentioned how people are moving in hopes of simple survival and the possibility of giving their families a better life. However, they also mentioned how these immigrants within the country have often simply replaced the agrarian poverty of the South with the stultifying factory work, the exposure to industrial chemicals and waste, and the unexpected poverty of the free-trade zones of the North.

I think that it’s important to note that the villagers, who challenged NAFTA and specifically the battery recycling company, were not “heroes” in a conventional sense, but their actions are heroic. In challenging this situation, they were leading moral lives, protecting their families, and working together to improve conditions in their village, possibly more for future generations than for themselves.

As I heard and read these stories, I tried to construct a “multi-voiced” text from the images and stories, as well as my questions, connections, and contrasting narratives. Instead of trying to analyze the stories, I did a clustering activity, listing the themes that I found discrepant and contrary to those in my own life. I asked myself how the actions of these villagers compared and contrasted to my own—even given our very different contexts. It occurred to me that I have been involved in community action—making phone calls for progressive political campaigns and for civil rights—primarily within the United States. Most of the causes that I have been involved in have been local or national. They have been international only to the extent that politicians I may have supported have addressed international issues. In contrast to my more site-specific political work, the villagers of Colonia Chilpancingo and the volunteers at Casa del Migrante have worked (and I think knowingly and explicitly so) on both a local and a structural level as to counter the impact of NAFTA on the lives of their community members, and in democratic ways. Their actions as local responses to international free trade agreements expand the notion of democracy from their communities to an international community. It is this particular form of democracy that is most intriguing for me to learn.

### Bringing It All Back Home: Curriculum as a Vortex for International Democratic Education

Meaningful international democratic education promotes principles of self-determination of all democratic countries and people, as well as a commitment to social justice for all people and the engagement of cross-border dialogue grounded in local meanings with global implications. To approach these goals, educators and students can take part in curricular processes of self-critique to imagine new possibilities for democracy when these new forms of democracy go beyond those they have known and lived. Students’ perceptions of international social justice and democracy stem from their patterns of thinking and their personal narratives, further framed by a national narrative. Working for international democracy, educators confront a dilemma of how to build on their students’ interpretations while changing and destabilizing them.

Asher, Sawyer, and Walker (2006) raise questions that can frame a process of how students can decompose and recompose their interpretive lenses.

How can we deconstruct such binaries as self and other, margins and center? How does the self unlearn the internalization of the oppressor (Freire, 1982 [1993])? What are the contradictions inherent in the processes of decolonization for colonizer and colonized? (p. 2)

It is important to note that the prefix “post” in “post-colonial” does not mean “after” but rather “critique,” as a means to effect change in perception around this concept.

Curriculum gives students a site to approach these questions to change who they are in relation to principles of international democracy. One important aspect in facilitating meaningful international democratic education is to allow students to co-construct curriculum embedded in life sources (Dewey, 1934, 1938). An honest and lived curriculum stems from “the inside experience of life in our self-stories” (Bradbeer, 1998, p. 14). Students’ generation of personal narrative in class as a basis for learning is always part of the curriculum of a classroom, although sometimes it is more part of the hidden curriculum. We learn in relational ways, by making connections among self, others, concepts, objects, space, time, and so on. And these elements are not piecemeal parts or snapshots but unfold overtime with narrative meanings and dimensions.

To make possibilities of curriculum for international democracy more real than rhetorical, students can engage in curricular processes of exploring their internalized barriers to international democracy. By either investigating their *currere* or constructing their duoethnographies, they can more explicitly engage and critique personal and national narratives in relation to this topic. Students who explore in tandem a specific theme in their personal stories (e.g., by way of duoethnography) juxtapose their curriculum of self to new ideas and material. This dialogic relationship between various subjects reflects

the plurality of subject positions operating at any given moment in the educational context. This approach seeks to integrate the logics of globalization into curriculum and educational frameworks by creatively interweaving the past, present, and future needs, interests, and desires of the full plurality of educational actors. (Matus & McCarty, 2003, p. 81)

As Greene (1991) states,

...human beings who lack an awareness of their own personal reality (which is futuring, questing) cannot exist in a ‘we-relation’ with other human beings. They cannot know what it means to live through a vivid present in common with another, to share another’s flux of experience in inner time. (p. 8)

Furthermore, curriculum itself may be subjected to an analysis of how it is implicated in colonizing processes. Possible examples of colonialism in curriculum include the framing of knowledge (often through or within a meta-narrative), sources and representations of knowledge, levels of student voice and agency, disciplinary divisions, as well as such staples of the U.S. educational system as testing, tracking, and labeling.

Within a context framed by colonialism, ways of thinking and acts of interpretations themselves can add an additional layer of cultural appropriation. While art and narrative can operate as a lens for personal and societal critique, their presentation and interpretation raise questions about latent colonialism inherent in a process of cultural interpretation of the other. As Hendry (2007) notes, “The act of interpretation is an act of colonizing” (p. 294). She continues,

As researchers we construct lives by reducing them to a series of events, categories, or themes and put them back together again to make up a whole called narrative. Thus by constructing narratives we not only ultimately erase part of our lived experience but also impose a particular way of thinking about experience. (Hendry, 2007, p. 491)

This appropriation of meaning is both implicit (e.g., the framing in this paper) and explicit (my presentation and interpretation) and raises a number of questions: As I call for a process of post-colonialism (de-colonialism?), am I in actuality engaged in an act of colonizing? How do academics, educators, and teachers from colonizing countries discuss narratives from other countries? In examining democratic education, how can educators incorporate narratives about cross-border experience as a way to allow educators and students to gain access to a deeper and more international perspective on democracy?

The sharing and critiquing of personal stories within in a broader framework is an initial step in approaching some of these questions. Replacing binary and monolithic thinking, such as self /other or the first world /third world, with layered, analytic, and dialogic processes is another step. Key to this process is the engagement of students in the use of deliberative skills which involves their learning to “listen across difference” (Enslin, 2006, p. 60). The importance of Enslin’s thoughts is underscored by and reflected in the work of the artists on the border wall, the villagers litigating against the battery recycling business, and the volunteers welcoming home travelers who have been expelled from other countries.

Instead of imposing our interpretation on the event, we can replace the “suspicion or doubt that we usually possess as we listen to stories...[with] trust” (Hendry, 2007, p. 494). This engagement then is grounded in “humility and faithfulness” (Fiumara, 1990, quoted in Hendry, 2007, p. 494). Instead of reinterpreting the stories we hear, we accept them. Secondly, we can use the art and stories as a lens for self-critique. We can attempt to listen to these stories in a way that disrupts our own story lines—decenters them. The emphasis is not on the analysis of the narrative but rather on what it can reveal about us, how it can lead to a shattering—or at least a problematizing—of self. The painting we examined in this paper lends itself—especially when discussed in a group—to an awareness of multiplicity—here, within a context of free trade and international relations. The goal for us as educators and students is to begin to construct new story lines for ourselves, not for others. As we seek out the contradictions, ironies, dilemmas, conundrums, confusions, and tensions within ourselves in relation to new ideas, such as international democracy, we create curriculum. As my group and I examined stories and artwork from Mexico, we were inspired to see people claiming parts of their own narratives in ways that promoted democracy—in the face of antidemocratic forces. In this paper I have tried to suggest that curriculum also gives people a context within which to reclaim their own narratives both individually and collectively—in democratic ways.



## Conclusion

Building on the work of curriculum thinkers who are working toward different forms of democratic education, I have suggested in this paper that the changing global landscape increases the importance of international democracy to curriculum. I have suggested that a focus of curriculum and education, tied to personal experience, would benefit from being situated within a larger international democratic context. This larger framing would help curriculum workers and their students not only reconsider myriad global crises but also build on the new international intersections of interpersonal dialogue, collective action, and democratic aspirations. To promote international democratic education within the United States, a critically dialogic curriculum—as symbolized here by a kaleidoscope—offers a dynamic vortex within which educators and students may engage in an active process of post-colonialism.

Furthermore, I have suggested that an exposure to the examples of democracy-in-action found in narratives and artwork of people working toward international democracy offers us an entry point into the study of this topic. Possibly all the people that we visited on our trip—the artists, the people in the villages, the war protesters—were engaged in some form of participatory democracy that promoted social justice. Their interactions were deliberative, inclusive, and grounded in their own and other people’s lives in the communities in which they lived. And while it might be easy to construct an ideal and romanticize meta-narrative around their actions, it is important to note that the people we met were simply doing what they felt that they had to do. Here, the meaning of democracy was found not in its rhetoric but rather in its humanity and grounding in life—in how it was lived.

## NOTES

### 1. A reviewer of this paper offers another interpretation:

In the middle panel, the artist draws a bottle of Coca Cola and replaces the words with “Coca-Killer.” The complete words on the mural are “Asesina Sindicalistas en Colombia,” and in fact the panel to the right are the colors of the Colombian flag, which would suggest that the artist is commenting on the role of corporations in the destruction of cocaine plantations in Colombia, thus “coca killer.” [*Sindicalistas* are] union and workers’ committee organizers (in Spanish, a “sindicato” is a union or a workers’ organization). The artist is making a direct connection between the destruction of cocaine plantations, the role of corporations, and the murder of organizers involved in community work in Colombia, not in Mexico, at least that’s how I interpret the image.

While specific details are read differently, we share the postcolonial interpretation of the painting.

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