

THE WORK OF THE BOOK REVIEW ESSAY IN MAKING AND RE-MAKING CURRICULUM STUDIES

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A SIGNIFICANT PORTION of our time as curriculum scholars has been spent in the physical and intellectual spaces of U.S.–based curriculum studies conferences, namely: the Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, the Curriculum and Pedagogy conference, AERA’s Division B meetings and sessions, the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies Annual Meetings, and the 2006 Purdue Conference on the “next moment” in curriculum studies. Conversations about the state of the field always seem to be central at these events. In addition to a relentless and ongoing desire to make proclamations assessing the vitality and shape of curriculum studies in U.S. and global academies, there seems to be an equally persistent longing among curriculum scholars to make proclamations about future directions that the field is taking, will take, or should take. Finally, it seems that a deliberate conversation about disciplinarity has emerged. Scholars are taking up questions of whether curriculum studies should be understood, narrated, and protected as a discipline all its own; if curriculum studies is, in its very nature, interdisciplinary and if these two possibilities are compatible. Our observations of these continually emerging and revolving discourses that surface at physical gatherings of the field play a profound role in shaping our understanding of the uses of the book review essay as a tool for making and re-making the curriculum studies field.

Regardless of where we fall on these three issues—the state of the field, the future directions of the field, and the role of discipline in narrating the field—they seem to be of central concern to many of the scholars who constitute the contemporary curriculum studies field (or at least to those who have physical access to its U.S. conference spaces). Thoughtful essay-length intellectual engagements with books that consider the multiple histories that come together to constitute the various states-of-the-field—that speak, however tentatively, to future possible directions of the field, and that by their very dialogical relationships with the books they are summarizing, re-read and re-theorize—are useful tools for extending these meta conversations to fora that are accessible to the curriculum studies community at large. That is, they engage a

larger curriculum studies community in narrating the boundaries of the field, and in challenging the permeability of those boundaries. Through thoughtful reading and engagement with each other's scholarship—and, perhaps more importantly, with the work of those who we may not name as curriculum scholars, but on whom we rely intellectually nonetheless—book review essayists make statements about how *they* understand the nature of the field and the various intellectual histories that shape it, creating new necessary possibilities for holding state-of-the-field conversations. It is our hope that the essays published in this section will do this work, to engage these issues and many more in creative and innovative ways consistent with the intellectual legacy of humanities–inflected inquiry that has always been central to the ideas expressed in this journal.

Specifically, of the authors who submit to Reviews, we ask: What are the intellectual histories upon which the selected text is built? When these histories converge to produce a curriculum studies text, what does this say about the nature of curriculum studies itself? What does the text have to teach curriculum scholars? And, perhaps most intriguing of all, what are the challenges it poses to curriculum studies, as a field?

In this first publication of Reviews, we offer two selections that artfully employ studies of individual texts to introduce readers to converging bodies of scholarship, three of which (autobiography, psychoanalysis, and theories of subjectivity and identity) have occupied considerable space in the U.S. curriculum studies field since JCT's inception and one of which (research on second language learning) is presented by our author as an emergent trajectory of thought in the U.S. curriculum studies field. In his review of Mika Yoshimoto's *Second Language Learning and Identity: Cracking Metaphors in Ideological and Poetic Discourse in Third Space* (2008), Seungho Moon describes a text that attempts to apply notions of third space to discourses of second language learning, and that employs haiku as a methodological tool for working through challenges of representation in qualitative research. Ultimately, Moon notes a text worthy for its theory-conscious analysis of second language learning research—a field typically situated in cognitive discourses—but problematizes Yoshimoto's use of third space, challenging readers to “consider the (im)possibilities of ‘undoing’ identities” in order to move beyond essentializing discourses. In his study of Brian Casemore's *The Autobiographical Demand of Place: Curriculum Inquiry in the American South* (2007), Westry Whitaker guides readers through the text's mobilization of autobiography and psychoanalysis in studying the “lacuna of the South (its imaginative history alongside its evasions of guilt and responsibility),” locating the text within both Southern studies and curriculum inquiry traditions. Whitaker challenges Casemore to elucidate an underlying metaphorical comparison between the South and curriculum studies itself, but ultimately finds a text that will prove useful in guiding curriculum theorists and practitioners alike in looking “inside and around [them] for insight into who we are and what we have become.”

Through publishing Reviews, we suggest that in our acts of reading and commenting upon literature and literary histories, we find possibilities for declaring and questioning our own positions and trajectories as scholars. We look forward to future submissions from essayists wishing to speak not solely to the arguments and composition of a text, but to its relevance for a field constantly seeking to locate and challenge its limits.

