

# Identity, Interdependence, and Curriculum of Social and Global Imagination

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**T**HIS ISSUE is the last issue I put together for *JCT*. No longer a co-editor as I write this editorial, I should say that the following is a note from a past co-editor. I would like to take this chance to thank everyone in the editorial team and all the reviewers for their wonderful works in revitalizing this important tradition for the past four years. Particularly I would like to thank my former editorial assistant (2008-2010) and assistant editor (2010-2011) later, Jill Martin, for her brilliant work with such a responsibility and rigor which exemplifies the creativity of and hope for a new generation. I also would like to thank the immediate past editorial assistant, Cicely Fanning, for her endless work on the smallest details in copyediting all the manuscripts, which has been more than demanding but she has handled with perseverance, humor, and care. I will also begin this editorial with Bill Doll's keynote at this year's Bergamo conference where he proposed a systemic approach to life, education, and pedagogy. It just seems to be a good fit to acknowledge three generations of intellectual works in the field of curriculum studies, to which we are commonly committed, as I depart *JCT*.

"Our mistake is in our thinking," Bill Doll claims, following Bateson, not thinking itself, but purposive thinking that "discards the systemic nature of the world" (Quoted in Doll, 2011, p. 3). Doll starts with Bateson's recreation of the Adam and Eve story which illustrates how Adam and Eve "cast out from the Garden the concept of their own total systemic nature and of its total systemic nature" (Quoted in Doll, 2011, p. 2; Bateson, 2000/1972, p. 440-441) to go on with their purposive business. We already know what such a purposive business has led to. What we need, instead, is a systems frame of "our personal selves nested within our society, itself nested within our culture, our environment, our planetary atmosphere, our universe, and our cosmos" (Doll, 2011, p. 5). Such a notion of nesting calls for a generative yet non-controlling relational dynamic that respects the creative process of life and calls for the human humility and joy of being part of a bigger system. Doll invites us to approach curriculum from a systemic approach so that "as teachers we might aid students in developing a new, cybernetic, way of thinking; and that all of us might approach life and its process of creating with an attitude of reverence" (Doll, 2011, p. 9).

Indeed, our mistake is in our thinking that we can control and conquer without suffering from the side effects of such a mechanism of controlling and conquering. Such a thinking self in his dualistic separation from the other and from the world, as Heesoon Bai and Avraham Cohen (2008) argue, is the source of violence, violence against the human other in various forms and violence against nature in its devastating effects. The systemic nature of life determines that our relentless control over others and over the cosmic system is also violence against ourselves as we are part of the system rather than the master of the system. But cultivating a nondualistic, inter-subjective, and ecological consciousness is not an easy task as it does not get along well with what has become our common sense.

When I taught the notion of nonviolence in teacher education last semester, it was quite interesting that some of my students felt so challenged by the demand of nonviolence that they tried to defend that violence is part of human nature. I confess that I was a bit taken back by the assumption of violence as natural while nonviolence as unnatural and the assumption that American culture is so competitive that it leaves little room for an interconnected view of life. It makes me think more deeply not so much about what is human nature—since for me it is not a given—but more about the cultural logic of violence.

In American education, social difference now has become a keyword and we have a lot of discussions about racial, ethnic, gendered, classed, and heterosexual violence and how to undo it. But we don't discuss much about intergenerational violence. Forming an independent identity is more fundamental than social identity and since it deals with what happens within close relationships or what is assumed as loving relationships, it reveals more about our implicit assumptions. It is not unusual for the older generation to feel that the younger generation has lost values of the good old days and for the younger generation to feel that the older generation has lost their creative energy, so mutual complains can be heard in almost all cultures. But I think what is unique to our culture is the demand for the younger generation to break away with the old in order to pursue their independence and to claim "singularity" through separation rather than interdependence. Without neglecting the negative hold of the old over the new, I wonder to what degree teenage rebellion is a myth, or a cultural construct that becomes an internalized demand, or are we truly genetically wired as more so than other people in this planet?

Rebellion of the young against the old is accepted or even celebrated in intellectual life as well. What such a celebration produces is not necessarily unrestrained creativity but fragmentations that split rather than integrate the system. We have learned not to "see" such an impact as it does not seem to be immediate and we have to march on to create a new world and claim it as our own. This desire of pushing for singularity at the expense of the network no doubt would be challenged by Bateson's and Doll's approaches. Bateson's concept of self "as a nexus of interactive pathways 'in a system which reaches outward to the cosmic process'" (Doll, 2011, p. 6) honors an interdependent sense of self who does not split off to stand above the system but contributes to the welfare of the whole system.

Drawing upon the Buddhist notion of nonduality, Peter Hershock (2009) argues for "a concerted shift from considerations of how much we are the *same* or *different from* each [sic] another to how we might best *differ for* one another" (p. 160). Such an approach of conceiving differences as part of relationship network for mutual contribution but not as something elevated above the system is refreshing. Here the issue is not so much about whether we are similar or different, but about whether or not we enhance the interconnectedness that we share in a generative system. As a former student of Bill Doll, I have witnessed how he embodied a systemic approach in his teaching and mentoring of students—to fully depict such relational dynamics he

has been able to nurture in and out of the classroom is a labor of another day, but it is sufficient to mention here that he has practiced what he proposed and that such an approach can be enacted with pedagogical and educational craft.

A systemic approach connects within and across different realms of life, including intellectual, historical, social, cultural, ecological, and spiritual realms. Enacting such an approach requires imagination to see through separation and fragmentation to uncover the fundamental relationality of human life. Michael Nagler (2004) asks, “If I don’t have the imagination to realize that you and I are one, despite our physical separateness and the differences in our outlooks on life, what is to prevent me from using violence if I think you’re getting in my way?” (p. 42). The capacity of social imagination to get in touch with the oneness of life is essential for a systemic approach.

Here I would like to briefly address the issue of national identity and global interdependence considering that this year is the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 11 tragedy. Indeed the US captured and destroyed our number one enemy, Osama bin Laden, just in time before the date of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary came. Yet, we are still in a global time of uncertainty, conflict, and hostility. Since I used to teach multicultural diversity issues every semester, every year around that time, I asked my students what the September 11 tragedy meant to them and how they made sense of it. Overwhelmingly students responded that it made Americans more close-minded to diversity, the security issues intensified, and that the educators must speak and act in a patriotic way. While I acknowledged the negative impact, I further asked students what possibilities that could be carved out of such a trauma as educators, but I seldom went anywhere with this question.

Certainly the September 11 tragedy has served as a catalyst for intensified nationalism for the past decade but there are educational possibilities that can be opened up after initial nationalistic and patriotic responses (Nicholson-Goodman, 2009). To a great degree, nationalism is a natural response to the external attack. As long as it still retains certain openness to the outside world, national identity can be productive, as both Derrida (1995) and Kristeva (1987) imply when they discuss narcissism. What struck me in the past decade of teaching was, however, that we don’t seem to be able to move beyond nationalism while all other possibilities seem to be closed off. Can we make sense of the tragedy in other different ways? At that time, as a foreigner, what I felt the most was how fragile humanity was, how easily human relationships could collapse, and how important that we needed to acknowledge the interdependence of the world. A curriculum landscape of social imagination to both affirm and go beyond national identity for global interdependence is yet to come.

We need to understand history and how we have become what we are, but such an understanding is for moving forward, not to be bound by the past. In the global settings, different nations have had disputes or even wars during different time periods. To achieve a productive global interdependence, we have to be able to see through conflicts for a bigger picture; otherwise, we will forever be confined by the “win-or-lose” mentality and cannot make meaningful connections. As educators, it is important to think: What has happened to the American identity and the American psyche for the past 10 years? What is the link between the intensified nationalism and increased push for teachers to raise students’ test scores? Is it possible to deconstruct the official competitive mentality in the global setting which prevails over any other educational possibility? How are we implicated in the mentality of “win-or-lose” as educators? How do we make sense of the ever-changing world and shift the direction of relational dynamics towards embracing global interdependence?

I end this editorial with a call for courage, compassion, and capacity: The courage to educate

against the grain, the compassion to connect across differences even when the other is depicted as evil, and the capacity to move beyond dualistic ways of thinking and teaching. To educate with courage, compassion, and capacity, we engage curriculum of social and global imagination for interdependence and integrate different psychic energies within ourselves in order to transform difficulties into life-affirmative capability.

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