

# Curriculum of the Eye/I<sup>1</sup>

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Dear Journal Editors,

I regret that I will be unable to complete my manuscript by the assigned date. I realize this complicates matters for you and I understand completely if you are unwilling or unable to accept my manuscript after the deadline. However I would like to make an appeal due to a set of extenuating circumstances which I feel compelled to explain to you.

It all started with the letter “I.” You see my son is in Pre-K and each week they are working on a different letter of the alphabet. Parents are asked to bring in snack at least once a month and the snack ideally should be related to the letter of the corresponding week. So today which was the day I was to bring snack (the same date which was the deadline for submission to your journal), I decided to bring in ice cream. Having an ice cream maker at home I thought it would be much more interesting for the children to make their own ice cream.

My daughter Molly woke up late and so I was 30 minutes late bringing both of my children to school which cut into the time I had planned to buy the ice cream ingredients from the grocery store. I also had an eye doctor’s appointment during the morning before going to my son’s class for the ice cream activity. While at the doctor’s they dilated my eyes. This appointment also took longer than expected so by the time I was done with the doctor, not only was my vision impaired but I was running late to meet my children for lunch and ice cream snack. I rushed home to grab the ingredients and ice cream machine and dashed back out of the house.

By the time I entered my son’s classroom to lead this special activity, the room appeared painfully bright and blurry. So half-blind I led 17 four-year-olds in a lesson on making ice cream. Although my eye pupils gave me the appearance of one who has just dropped acid, I was well prepared. I had large cue cards printed out with measurements and pictures and symbols for key terms such as sugar, milk, and cream. Everyone got a turn doing something, from pouring ingredients into the bowl to mixing everything in the bowl. Then we poured it into the machine and turned it on. While the ice cream was supposed to be churning, I also brought marshmallows and frosting so each child could make and eat his or her own mini Igloo (the letter I, remember?). Thirty minutes later, the ice cream ingredients were no closer to making ice cream when I realized that I had forgotten the paddle that goes in the middle of the machines bowl, which actually churns the ice cream. So rather than having ice cream I had a bowl full of fucking cream

and sugar. What to do? So I immediately ran over to the corner store which is thankfully only a block away to buy ice cream. While they did not sell ice cream by the gallon they did have small single size containers. The gods must have been with me because they were chocolate chip ice cream, which was exactly what I had told the children we were making. They might only be four but even they would catch on if the ice cream they put into the mixing machine was vanilla with the chocolate chip and the ice cream that came out was chocolate or strawberry. So I dashed back to the school with my 17 cups of ice cream, and in the snack room (away from the curious eyes of my son's class) I perpetrated an act of trickery. I scooped out each of the 17 cups into the machine and stirred it around until they all looked blended, and then returned to classroom. "Look!" I cried with feigned joy, "Ice cream! Good job everyone!" Of course my bait and switch went off without a catch and everyone enjoyed their faux homemade ice cream. Of course the whole God damn process took much longer than I had anticipated.

So again while I apologize deeply for the delay in my manuscript which I had the greatest intentions of completing today, I guess you could say I was left up shits creek without an ice cream paddle.

## Framing the Eye

**CURRICULUM OF THE EYE/I** was originally written for a small audience of other "Mama PhD's" (Evans & Grant, 2008) with whom I work and whom I consider close friends. We routinely send each other emails describing the latest encounter with illnesses, accidents, injuries, and other child-related events and juxtapose them with our academic careers. The experiences documented in the *Eye/I* are all true, and I believed, worth documenting to the group because I knew they would be able to identify with the humor and frustration particular to mothers struggling to achieve scholarly success. Its framing as a letter similarly points to the complicated nature of my socio-cultural roles that foreground mother and scholar. On one hand, I framed it as a (faux) letter to a journal editor to illustrate the challenges that these experiences present to my academic self. On the other, it constituted the sum total of my original submission to this journal and my expansion here is due in no small part to the editor's request that I use my thinking as a springboard for a more engaged examination of what this piece means for the field of curriculum studies in general and my own constructions of sense-making in particular. The email circuit provided a space for counter-narratives to be exchanged. A place where the languages and experiences that we know from our collective and individual experiences *matter* to the work we do can be brought into the foreground, even if such experiences and the languages we use to describe them are still often marginalized from the Official Conversation of academia in general and theorizing in specific.

The sensory world of mothering crashes into my friends' and my scholarly worlds whether we say it out loud or not. But they inform us either way (McDermott, 2006). As a collective of women with shared concerns, we are theorizing as we email our stories to one another (Grumet, 1988; Springgay & Freedman, 2010); recognizing the influences that feeling tired, hungry, rushed, cold, hot, fat, thin, ragged, broken, inspired, rested, joyous..., (all) have within the site specific contexts of our mothering lives to the theories we construct or attempt to understand (for similar conversations on situatedness and identity see for example, Casemore, 2007; Whitlock, 2007, 2009).

Throughout this article I feel a tension between using a sense-oriented “informal” narrative of mothering and the theorizing of it (which feels disembodied when it becomes too abstract), a tension mirrored in the social sciences that has led to the call for sensuous scholarship (Stoller, 1997). In light of this friction, I will be providing embodied experience-stories to situate their framing in more typical academic language. I don’t want to fall into the trap of enacting that which this paper argues against. That would be ironic wouldn’t it? But I am willing to dance in the in-between. I want to get published after all, right? I wonder: What of our personal bodied selves and stories are we willing to silence in order to maintain an academic self?

A “good” paper in curriculum theory usually includes citations from scholars whose language is sometimes so impenetrable it requires a mental chainsaw. Do I include them sometimes in my own work only to prove my own intellectual acuity? Or, do they serve to further a theory that leads toward change through action? This is not a statement against the importance of theoretical scholarship or the use of complex language but rather an attempt to make explicit the disembodied nature of scholarship, even about the body, and the ways in which such talk (perhaps) unintentionally serves to reify notions about the superiority of Western constructions of knowledge that often marginalize feminine and non-Western perspectives (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001; Grumet, 1988; Tuhwai-Smith, 1999). I have therefore chosen here to include those theorists and scholars whose voices resonate with me because of the power of their argument rather than the embodied nature of their discourse.

For example, sometimes the word “poop” has more power than the word “post” anything. I am reminded of Milan Kundera’s (1984) treatise on shit, in which he retells the story of the Garden of Eden and the importance of shit to the human experience:

As long as man was allowed to remain in Paradise, either (like Valentinus’ Jesus) he did not defecate at all, or (as would seem more likely) he did not look upon shit as something repellant. Not until after God expelled man from Paradise did He make him feel disgust. Man began to hide what shamed him, and by the time he removed the veil, he was blinded by a great light. Thus, immediately after his introduction to disgust, he was introduced to excitement. Without shit (in both the literal and figurative senses of the word), there would be no sexual love as we know it, accompanied by pounding heart and blinded senses. (p. 247)

### Motherhood in Academia

I started my career in academia single and unencumbered by children. I thought brilliant thoughts and wrote lengthy incomprehensible sentences (*yes, indeed I was ready for the big leagues*). Then my body doubled in size and I squeezed out two small heads, since which time I haven’t had a solid night’s sleep or eaten a decent meal. I catch myself drooling and often forget my own zip code. But the job must go on, right? So, what happens to the mind when the senses take over, demanding your constant attention?

At first I resigned myself to a fate that I simply could no longer think and produce “important” or “meaningful” work. *Fuck Gramsci, I can barely remember the milk on my grocery list*. I worried about “making sense”—ironically enough itself a term born of our bodied way of being, to “sense” something, has come to mean sounding “logical or rational” (concepts associated with the abstract realm of the mind). But something else has emerged from this chaos (as invariably it

does if we open our eyes to witness the myriad of possibilities that really are there). After having children I was forced to pull my body and mind back downwards to earth, to gravitate my ways of knowing outside of my head and into my immediate senses again. At first there was a total disconnect. I was either thinking about work, or I was doing my job as a mother. But just as I began worrying that I could not do both, they started to merge.

As I have begun to conceptualize it in this fashion, curriculum theory of the senses within the framework of making “sense” of mothering in academia has enabled two things to happen for me. First, it brings the body of daily life back into my conversations about curriculum theorizing, creating a space where mothering has a voice and location in the curriculum discourse. Note that this is different than using more traditional, scholarly language to consider the issues or themes of motherhood within the academic discourse. Such language dis-embodies the ideas from the experiences. It has a dislocating effect. I am thinking about it but I can no longer *sense* it.

Tracing its steps back to *currere* (Pinar, 2004), and the iterations of similar theories which have followed in the last several decades, identity construction in curriculum theorizing is mediated in large part by what we hear, see, taste, and touch every day. Yet the richness of those experiences have been left behind, or outside the frame of the conversation, leaving us with the more abstract re-interpretation from those sensory experiences—as if they have been “sanitized” for academic settings. In essence we have washed our hands of the poopy diapers, leaking nipples, the stink of late night throw up, freshly bathed baby bodies, and snotty tissues, sanitizing them to only the *ideas* of what those moments might mean, rather than considering that how what one *feels in* those moments might contribute to the abstract conclusions we make. And the power behind conveying those moments exactly how they happen brings the senses of others (the reader or audience) *into* the meaning making process. As Springgay and Freedman (2009) illustrate, we need a way for:

opening up maternity to the in-between of corporeality, materiality, and difference. By its exposure to intimacy and vulnerability, m/othering, like a bodied curriculum premised on being-with, enables selves and others to experience a collision, a bursting into being, that shifts the perception of embodiment as universal towards an understanding of bodied subjectivity and knowledge as difference. (p. 25)

Secondly, in my inquiry about curriculum theorizing through the senses, keeping this first premise in mind, I find that my every day sense making outside the ivory tower directly influences my theorizing in ways I had never predicted. For my own work, what I am coming to consider as sense-based curriculum theorizing (a growing conceptualization that is still gestating) brings to the foreground those experiences and knowledges that though pertinent to my work and scholarship have historically been ignored or avoided in academic conversations. These are the languages and knowledges of motherhood, a state of being that academia has sought to exclude from scholarly conversations through its implicit and explicit contention that scholarship is of the mind—as motherhood is of the body, the two ought to remain separate. To succeed in this framing of academia often necessitates the time (and space) to quietly sit and contemplate, unfettered by the daily concerns of our mundane senses, like crying children and making birthday party cupcakes. A curriculum theory of the senses brings these embodied daily experiences and the language of that sense making to the center of the conversation.

Springgay and Freedman (2009) articulate that “it is this relationality, characterized by the sense touch, which is the second element that calls us to write about and re-conceptualize curri-

culum as m/othering” (p. 26). Yet, in the ivory tower, being a mother means “not bringing your family life to work” and working to “prove” that one can “produce” (like one’s male counterparts most often) in spite of the obligation that caring for small children brings. By considering my curriculum theory through my senses I am able to bring both worlds together, which in fact, in “real life”...they are.

## Theorizing the Senses

If you ask the average person on the street what they think “theory *is*,” I suspect that most if not all responses will have something to do with terms such as “abstract,” an “idea,” and most likely “having nothing to do with real life.” We in the field of curriculum theorizing know these assumptions to be somewhat inaccurate. However, they persist in part because something does indeed get lost in translation between the world of curriculum theory in academia and what theory of curriculum means “out there.” Traditional Western scholarship supposedly happens in the “mind” while one is devoting their sole energies to sitting and contemplating the world (usually in a tower that just happens to be made of ivory). Experiences with the hands, for example in the form of working class jobs, anything using the body over the mind, including work in education (and mothering), are considered “lower” forms of labor and knowledge construction. Jilk (2010), a classroom teacher and graduate student explains:

Teachers’ work in K-12 classrooms and the knowledge gained from it is undervalued. The lower a person is on the food chain of education, the less their work is publicly acknowledged, valued or rewarded...the hierarchy of education tends to valorize the work of those who spend their days reading, writing, and researching the teachers and teaching jobs they left behind. (np)

I suggest that what is lost in translation, the missing piece of the equation, is a language of the senses. From this position, the senses become both a theoretical site, and also of equal importance, that the senses are a process for theorizing—an embodied and sensorial language that we too often exclude from the discourse of and around curriculum theory. So I ask myself in my own inquiry of theory, what is left out and what are the implications of such exclusions?

When Descartes rolled out his “I think therefore I am” rallying cry back in the Enlightenment era, I like to believe that it had a liberatory effect on individuals to break free from the strong holds of oppressive theocratic and monarchical regimes which used the sensory world to keep their subjects in a state of subjugation. On a side note, I am curious if Descartes had a wife and kids, and if he did, would she have agreed with him.

But several hundred years later, this same ideological argument, “I think, therefore I am,” followed by similar slogans like “mind over matter,” have become central tenets to an imperialist colonial view of the world, one which elevates knowledge of the mind as having privilege over knowledge of the body (or the senses) and subsequently creating a hierarchy of what (and whose) knowledge has value. This hierarchy finds its way across all spaces of teaching and learning, from the Tylerian and “Hunterized” models for K-12 classroom instruction and the books of Bill Bennett (1995) and E. D. Hirsch (1997) that espouse what knowledge is of most value to all children, to the colonial gaze of academic inquiry described by Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) that views indigenous perspectives, methodologies, and languages as “naïve, contradicto-

ry, or illogical” (p. 14), i.e., not *making sense*. In *The Eye/I*, the senses are the input through which I get to the mothering, to the experience and language for the opportunity to theorize, a space for bringing this language of the senses out from the margins.

### The Senses, Theorizing, and Discourses of Power

The senses are not just about what one feels in terms of emotional well-being such as feeling happy, sad, or scared. The senses convey what one literally tastes, sees, hears and feels: Sweaty, cold, cramped, warm, soft, dim light, or loud noise (Ellsworth, 2005; Howes, 2005). Such theorizing relies on the relationship between experience and the language possibilities for conveying these experiences. Narratives of the senses bring experiences to academic conversations in a very material way. This discourse in process and form articulates how sensory experiences of daily life inform theory, and offers a language with which to express the interconnectedness between the personal, the public, the private and the political, the spatial, the historical, and the social.

The broader more abstract notions of identity construction performed through the refracting lenses of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status (to name but a few lenses) begins with how we *move* through the world-literally. To discuss the issues of mothering as a feminist lens in academia using the abstract language of dominant narrative and traditional frames of academic discourse is very different than what I intended to do in *the Eye/I*. The former dislocates the theory from the experience from which it was created. My *Eye/I* piece was written to use the language of the senses, *through the senses* to bring my reader with me in a relational way to identify with my theory of experience. The “validity” of the scholarship rests not in its generalizability (i.e., that all other mothers have the same experience) but in the connections with one another through the senses (Eisner, 1997). In other words, I do not understand my narrative as a form of absolute truth. I am not arguing that all or even most mothers in academia have such experiences. But, similar to other forms of qualitative research in education (LeCompte, Milroy, & Preissle, 1992) drawing from moments specific to what my body absorbs and the relationship between the sensory and the mind and thought, readers can translate that to what they might feel as well when their sense undergo similar experiences.

So while I identify (within the context of my race, culture, social class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) with the dislocated and silenced narrative of the feminine (Miller, 2005; Wise & Fine, 2008; Grumet, 1988), I can also envision the ways in which sense-oriented curriculum theorizing, with its language of space, place, location, metaphor, aesthetics, and perspective, could strengthen the movement for scholars to gain voice and recognition within curriculum studies without having to dislocate experience or one’s voice (where one must keep “silent” opposing viewpoints, and content themselves with feeling “invisible”). Sense-based theorizing asks less about what one thinks so much as it asks who one is, by way of what one experiences in their body as it moves through the world.

Personal stories of sense making through the body create a space for generating questions and dialogue that too often remain invisible or along the margins, preventing alternative democratic spaces to emerge. Saltmarsh (2007) contends that “The widespread retreat from participation and *direct experiences* (my emphasis) tend to limit political action to a narrow definition of procedural democracy...” (p. xix).

The power dynamic at stake here is that the language of experience is excluded from the discourse of Official Knowledge creation and decision making. The perspectives, experiences, and knowledges of those who do not possess the power-language of the scholar, of the expert, or of the professional may thus be excluded from the Conversation. But these stories as such offer means for provoking empathy and empowerment.

### Academic Language, Elmo Cakes and Green Poop

I have enormous respect for the work of Springgay and Freedman (2009) including their work on M/Othering, and the contributions they offer to the field of curriculum in, with, and through the senses. They write:

Our interest in mothering is born of two inter-related elements. The first being our own lived experiences as new mothers. These often anxiety ridden, immanently hilarious, and sometimes grotesque experiences of mothering are marked by vulnerability, intimacy, and incompleteness—all aspects of relational knowing. It is this relationality, characterized by the sense touch, which is the second element that calls us to write about and re-conceptualize curriculum as m/othering. (p. 26)

Yet I find myself wanting to hear the stories untold between the lines of their text—the ones filled with moments that are anxious, grotesque, and humorous. The slash within their title serves as a painful visual reminder of the divisions between bodies and language experienced by mothers in the field of curriculum theorizing.

I juxtapose the quote in the preceding paragraph with this next quote from the same co-authors a year later (Springgay & Freedman, 2010):

...I wasn't doing such a skilled job of nursing with one hand, while flipping the other through files on the table. My breast kept falling out of her mouth. Milk sprayed and Mauyra screamed. Then she pooped. Without a changing table nearby I hovered in a corner of the conference room cleaning yellow baby shit while simultaneously being asked by colleagues my opinions about various (job) candidates...(p. 353)

More than the concise, theoretical, and well-argued text they present in the first quote, it is the embodied localized “messy” sensory-based stories of their own mothering experiences (elevated beyond the status of our private email circuit) that ought to be recognized as a significant form of curriculum inquiry. The latter quote delivers a more powerful “punch” than does the former in expressing what needs to be said in our theorizing discourses, and which are deserving of equal space and time within academia itself. Literally and figuratively, I wish to eliminate the slash between M and Other.

In working on this manuscript I asked Stephanie for assistance in locating some of the references cited here. Our emails were a blend of academic citations, titles, and ideas. At the end of one email I apologized for not being very clear in my description for this paper but Molly was seated on the toilet at the moment screaming for me to come “and wipe her.” I hit send. A few moments later I found a helpful reply in my in box from Stephanie to which I replied, “Thanks. By the way, any ideas what makes poop turn green?” I include this story as an illustration of the

inseparable nature between our mothers/curriculum scholar selves in working through what is that we come to know or understand in our curriculum theorizing. The layered-ness of the dialogic relationships between our multiple worlds is too often left on the cutting room floor, edited out, leaving only the shiny clean product for consumption by the reader.

I want stories about the Elmo cakes, the broken toe from a can of beans at a grocery store, the lice incidents, the calls to the principal's office, and the all-nighters with the stomach flu to be granted more "official" space in our theorizing about these issues. I want to acknowledge their contributions to the larger theoretical curricular frames which they inform and shape. These conversations embody the everyday sensory experiences that *are* our theoretical frameworks from which we work. By the way, in case my reader is curious, we determined it is the Valentine's Day candy that turns poop green.

*Feb 5<sup>th</sup> 2011. I receive a text from Victoria, my "partner in crime" at my University. She has a two year old son, who was appearing sick today. My daughter Molly had been up all night crying. Possible ear infection. This morning she and I met to lead a workshop for elementary mentor classroom teachers about the Teaching Professional Assessment Consortium (TPAC). During the whole meeting "V" and I keep taking turns running out to call our respective child care providers and pediatricians. Simultaneously, we are presenting teachers with ways to think about how to incorporate "academic language" into their classroom practices; the importance of giving students the official language of knowledge construction. Here is how our text conversation went:*

*Victoria: Henry has strep throat. How about Molly?*

*Morna: Ear infection. Lalalalala.*

*Victoria: Working mommthood sucks. There's academic language for you.*

Ignoring these sensory sites for meaning making and expression disembodies scholars from their locations in and perspectives of daily life and the Other (even if, as in the case of mothers in academia, the Other is our self). For example, Baudrillard (1996) whose theorizing draws upon profane events in American culture such as professional wrestling writes about these events and experiences in such a way that (while I personally appreciate his scholarship) I doubt any individuals from those communities about which he is writing would ever read, or have the language accessibility to read his work. When theorizing about oppression, discrimination, inequality, power, and lack of representation, who are we writing for?

## Aesthetic Inquiry and 'Sense'-making

Sense-based inquiry draws on perception. The senses: What we taste, feel, see, touch, hear, and say—these experiences, processed through mind and body (sense and cognition), are what make us human. To dull the senses is to dull our humanness. Literally, to stop feeling, to stop caring. Inhuman acts become do-able when you don't feel anything for self or Other. To anesthetize, to be numb, is to stop feeling both joy and pain:

When people perceive nothing to be shared, no dynamic but disconnection, inhumanity can flourish even in environmentally blessed areas. The physical qualities of place and



the care-full perceptions of the individuals embedded in that place are jointly important to the evocation of a compassionate place. (Keller & Weisser, 2007, p. 161)

I am not suggesting that the senses are necessarily some direct pathway to Truth. The senses can be misleading, as anyone who has had a panic attack or a fight in which they were so angry that what they heard and what the other person was really saying were out of sync, can affirm. But sensory oriented curriculum inquiry, making meaning through the senses in collaboration with the mind, opens the door for non-dominant, marginalized ways of knowing and methods of inquiry to de-center hegemonic Cartesian world views prevalent in higher education (i.e., the ivory tower) and mainstream contemporary K-12 formal curriculum (that prize disembodied facts and figures over real world experiences). Sensory-oriented curriculum inquiry embraces non-Western and feminine perspectives. Western paradigms of scholarship and work in the academe were built around, and still mirror, the metanarrative of masculine Eurocentric White paradigms of knowledge reproduction. Is it really a coincidence that men are still more likely to get tenure (and higher pay) than their female counter-parts? And the tone of scholarship and research still remains “white and male” regardless of the authors’ own gendered, cultural, or racial identity—using terms like seminal, discover, naming, claiming, dissemination, and dare I add “hard” data...as normative terms to describe (often in metaphorical reference to the sensual body) research and scholarship. Jilk (2010) summary of the history of women in public education does not sound too dissimilar from the experiences of the difficulties faced by mothers in academia. She writes:

For women seeking independence from their stifled roles as daughters, housewives and mothers, the school became just another place where women were required to “put away the personal self, become an instrument, an abstraction, working upon certain material, the class, to achieve a set purpose,” (Grumet, 1988, p. 49), and succumb to patriarchal order and control. (np)

Pink (2009) contends that sense based ethnographic inquiry:

1) explores relationship between sensory perception and culture, 2) engages with questions concerning the status vision and its relationship to the other senses, and 3) demands a form of reflexivity that goes beyond the interrogation of how culture is ‘written’ to examine the sites of embodied knowledge. (p. 15)

Aesthetic inquiry is a close first cousin to sense-based inquiry (not as a methodology in itself but one that lends itself to other methods such as auto-ethnography, postcolonial, and First Nations approaches to inquiry). Eisner suggests that aesthetic inquiry “validates” itself not through its generalizability but through its relationality—how we relate to a narrative through the senses-and offers alternative perspectives of those different from my own by bringing me to someone else’s experiences (Eisner, 1997; McDermott, 2002). Our embodied and mindful relationships to one another, to self and Other, to self and world (however one chooses to define those terms) are each ostensibly related to the senses. Perspectives and perceptions, which situate what and how and why we *relate* to the world, are manifested through the senses.

Mothering is just one of many scholarly sites for which sense-based theorizing can center experiences that are often buried underneath or erased by traditional academic forms of dis-

course. Referring to aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Keller and Weisser (2007) explain that “in local contexts singers do not try and manipulate their performances to articulate dominant ideologies but rather present identity and belonging as emergent from local and regional senses of place and personhood” (p. 5). They add that, “uncovering processes of cultural production behind Indigenous music and dance reveals social complexes of knowledge, power, and identity about land rights, politics, social systems, religious understanding and the forces of representation” (p. 5).

I make the argument in “outlaw” arts-based research (McDermott, 2010) that aesthetic inquiry is not inherently libratory or revolutionary and that it can reproduce the same dominant and oppressive scholarship it aims to dismantle, creating a new form of “artellectualism” (p. 10). Sense-oriented curriculum theorizing similarly does not by its very form become arts-based or libratory. It is not a means by which we can illustrate the Truth. But “outlaw” arts-based research, emphasizing the sense of place, space, and context of an experience:

Continuously challenges all borders and boundaries and remains suspect of definitive claims to identity on such positioning. Being an outlaw does not define one’s identity in relationship to being inside or outside anything. Rather it is in how one *moves* in his or her actions, not who one *is* or *is not*. (McDermott, 2010, p. 10)

An aesthetic curriculum theory is not, simply by virtue of being a form of art, immune from defaulting consciously or unaware into an elitist framework which “elevates” aesthetics and the arts to a space of privilege—a club that has its own “inner circle” whose lines have been created by those within the circle establishing its own rules for language use and definitions of “goodness” in inquiry and art-making.

In contrast, aesthetic inquiry closely tied to sense-based inquiry, and created by oppressed and marginalized persons or groups, uses aesthetics (and the senses through art-making) to empower perspectives and experiences that have been historically “invalidated” in scientifically-based models of inquiry. As McNiff (1998) describes:

[t]he process of drumming, and the use of our hands, bodies, and other senses as well as the activation of dormant dimensions of the mind, may offer ways of solving and re-visioning problems that are simply not possible through descriptive and linear language. (p. 33)

When sensory-oriented curriculum inquiry is situated as a central way of knowing within auto-ethnographic and aesthetic frameworks, ideas and experiences of oppressed individuals or groups, opportunities to know those experiences both empower the person sharing the experience and create opportunities to disrupt privileged perspectives (such as mine as a White middle class heterosexual female). Using her work as a poet in auto-ethnography Stone-Hanley (in press) argues, “How can you know me if you don’t *feel* me?” (np). She suggests that

The use of the arts to challenge racism in educational institutions may provoke percipients and audiences to imagine an experience of race in education outside of their own frame of reference, or to the very least unsettle emotional and cognitive barriers that limit their ability to empathize. (np)

We are moved, through the senses, in aesthetic forms such as music, film, drama, story, and visual art, offering alternative perspectives as counter-perspectives to the master narrative of the colonizer, counter perspectives that illuminate the weight of experience through the senses (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001; Greene, 1998). Referring to the work of Pendergast, Stone-Hanley (in press) suggests that poetry for example, “has often been used to express socio-political concerns, as an act of witness, and as a way to express affective experiences” (np).

### The Non-sense of Classroom Curriculum

We need to infuse sense based knowing into curriculum theorizing, in hopes that such theorizing will lead toward more sensory-centered curriculum practices. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is hardly cutting edge these days, but even he knew that children who are hungry or tired cannot retain abstract knowledge as successfully as those who have fewer embodied concerns. We need to be less concerned with what children “know” and more focused on what children “experience”—toward a more libratory and equitable pedagogy (Huckaby, 2010; Springgay, 2008). Desensitizing the curriculum leads to a practice which, as Taubman (2007) explains, reduces “everyone and everything to quantifiable data, ranging from test scores and attendance records to performance on behavioral check sheets, all historical, personal, idiosyncratic, and context-specific details about a person or event are erased” (p. 154).

Traditional models of curriculum in most Westernized public schools systems are ones in which the formal curriculum (by definition of most public school mandates) is written first. And what is written is a series of pre-determined steps organized to fit any student in any context, as an a-historical document, because it was written in a disembodied and abstract context, and that attempts to manufacture experiences for students. A curriculum of the senses is one in which experience is located, lived, and articulated through the body as well as the mind. It is local, personal, and situated—connecting voice and body of the self through the senses to the larger community, making democracy an enacted series of personal choices which have greater social effects. John Saltmarsh, referring to the social activism and sustainable practice for living espoused by Bill Copperthwaite (2007), writes:

Traditional education, in Bill’s view, puts “children behind a desk and make(s) them stay quiet and inactive for long periods of time from very early years, insisting that they learn the material that is unrelated, for the most part, to their lives in any way they can see.” To remedy this, he believes schools need to provide for “excitement and physical challenge through work and through living close to the natural forces of wind and sea.” (p. 7)

Curriculum of the senses is in the being and becoming of our lives. It situates the narrative of experiences “lost” from the discourse of dominant scholarship and knowledges of what matters. I am thinking at the same time that I am doing. The disruptions brought about by my “mothering life” inform my academic thinking life, a dialogue between the sensory input and the abstract ideas. They are asynchronous, a third space (Serres, 1997) where “noise” (Gershon, this issue, in press) occurs—seemingly having nothing to do with each other. But that is only in the paradigm of traditional inquiry and theory. In THIS sense-oriented theorizing they have everything to do with each other, and in fact construct an alternative transformative way to re/conceive what inquiry might be, what knowledge matters, and to whom. In this third space a new inquiry is

possible, one that bridges the way for non-dominant discourses to share space with traditional inquiry, bringing validity to these experiences.

We all experience the world through our senses to varying degrees, even if we experience them differently. The differences are what get lost in the urge to argue truths rather than “feel” the Other. Such counter narratives are still too few in mainstream scholarship, affecting what, and how, and who, we see as being included in theorizing.

### Conclusion: In My Shoes

Let me conclude this way: When your morning (like mine did today) consists of trying to get four children all under the age of 7 off to school—two of them to pre-K and two others to elementary school, two of them yours, two of them belonging to your friend—the three year old wailing because she thinks she is “always last to be let out of the car” while two others go dashing up the sidewalk without you, and you are so distracted by them you don’t notice one six year old boy still climbing down from his seat and so you smash the side of his head with the car door...fearing for the red mark or bruise that will appear shortly just as your son is arriving into his classroom you reach for a large (yet dirty) chunk of ice lining the parking lot and press it onto his forehead...At that precise moment, statements like,

*This process suggests a form of re-presentation that exists in the experience of ongoing creation, refracting place and time into a hybrid of what has been done and the synchronistic revelations that occur outside the bounds of what is already known (Daspit & McDermott, 2000, p. 2)*

mean about as much to you as a fart hole in a snow bank. You’ve been catapulted by your senses in the experience of the moment into another dimension where your priorities and perspectives are dramatically changed. Certain things just seem so...irrelevant in light of your current mental and physical state.

And more importantly to the field of curriculum theorizing, you have been granted alternative sites and sources for theorizing because your world of the senses informs how you think. And unless you’ve had these experiences or can empathize with them through a form of inquiry such as a sense-based narrative, this kind of story making is generally reduced to little more than one’s own whining and has no “place” with “higher knowledge.” As Stone-Hanley (in press) so poignantly puts it in her poem *Sankofa*: “But you don’t want none of this...” (np).

Why must we remain divided between worlds and languages we use to situate ourselves? Like Jardine (2000), I suggest we “begin the difficult work of breaking open the seemingly hard, unforgiving surface of this most ordinary of things” (p. 4), in my case—daily life of the senses as a mother, “and see how right here, in the midst of this mendacity, ‘the gods themselves are present’” (p. 4). Ignoring the senses in their immediacy of time and place as sites for meaning making and expression disembodies scholars from their locations in and perspectives of daily life. Additionally, we keep others out of the conversation by the languages we deem accessible and acceptable and that other ways of knowing and being are invisible.

### Afterward: Curriculum of the Ear (Infection)

*Thursday, 2:00 p.m.: “Dear Walter. Sorry. I was planning on spending this afternoon working on this manuscript, but it appears that Molly has an ear infection and I need to take her to the doctors.”*

*After her visit to the doctor I start the car and I have a thought regarding this paper. I pull out my notebook and take a second to jot down my thoughts about the body and the senses. (Note: Molly is four years old and cannot “read” nor have I discussed this topic with her). As I am quietly writing in the front seat she asks me, “Mommy, we’re in our bodies, right?”*

*I get an eerie feeling of synchronicity coming on.*

*“Yes we are Molly” I reply, smiling. How does she know?*

*“Why?” She asks. I am not sure what the why is directed towards.*

*I ask for clarification “Why are we in our bodies?”*

*“Yeah.” She waits for an answer. I put down my pen.*

*“I don’t know Moll.” I pause. “Where else would we be?”*

## About the Author

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## NOTES

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