

Destabilizing Curriculum History: A Genealogy of Critical Thinking

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In the specialized areas of erudition as in the disqualified, popular knowledge there lay the memory of hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge. [...] Let us give the term genealogy to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today. (Foucault, 1980, p. 83).

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY (SFU) IN VANCOUVER, CANADA admits approximately 7,500 new students annually; of these, over 1000 students enroll in a first-year philosophy course in critical thinking (*Course section enrolment report*, 2012). While this course is one of the largest within this institution, it is offered in one of the smallest departments. Importantly, Philosophy XX1, entitled *Critical Thinking*, is not considered an introduction-to-philosophy course; rather, it is intended to be disciplinary neutral, for students not necessarily pursuing a philosophy degree. While standard course credit is granted for successful completion, the class is not given numerical merit, and has simply been designated XX1. As the Spring 2012 course outline reads, the subject of critical thinking within this course involves teaching the “fundamental aim of being a responsible thinker, consumer and citizen” and “the ability to efficiently and accurately distinguish truth claims from false ones.” Similarly, the Summer 2012 course outline explains Phil XX1 as “a practical course, a course in applied logic” that will help students become better readers, listeners, writers, and speakers through providing “tools” that are needed in order to pursue academic interests and goals, and “fulfill” the “capacity to be rational.”

This mandate to make a student a critical thinker is linked closely to its legitimation within curriculum, and the institutional impetus to create critical students. It is a formulation that can work to efface the actual, contentious history of critical thinking at SFU, and thus a reconsideration of this taken-for-granted assumption of critical thinking—a contextualization of the ostensibly decontextualized curriculum—is needed. How has this description of critical

thinking reached its contemporary manifestation? How do we chart its life course within the operations of SFU's curriculum? These questions form the crux of this paper.

Contemporary critical-thinking courses within the discipline of Philosophy have been highly influenced by what O'Donnell (2006) describes as a classical model of rationality. Phil XX1 is not an exception, covering subjects such as argumentative structure, argument reconstruction and evaluation, truth tables, and fallacy detection. Critical thinking, as an application of rationally derived concepts, involves recognizing faulty arguments, truth claims, generalizations, obscure concepts, missing evidence, and learning an epistemological framework containing reliable procedures of inquiry (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Ennis, 1987; Siegel, 1988). As prominent critical-thinking scholar Richard Paul (1990a) argues, individuals need to learn "the art of explicating, analyzing, and assessing" arguments, an essential skill "to leading an examined life" (p. 66). In what Barnett (1997) describes as "one of the defining concepts of the Western University" (p. 3), critical thinking has come to be broadly emphasised as an essential learning outcome, objective, and skill (Moore, 2011; Stassen, Herrington & Henderson, 2011).

Critiques of critical thinking based on the conceptual framework of rationality have been levied from various perspectives. John McPeck (1990, 1994) argues that critical thinking, as something conceived as untethered to a specific object or subject, presumes that what constitutes an effective thinker transcends context. Forming what McPeck terms a "trivial pursuit" theory of knowledge, critical thinking understood in this way rests on the belief that knowledge is something that is unambiguous and noncontroversial, simply formed into discrete and factual information.¹ What Walters (1986) describes as critical thinking through "analytical reductionism" may ignore the values and norms carried within pedagogical practices. Critical thinking, as providing a framework by which "good thinking" can be determined, privileges rational and logical analyses above other forms of analysis deemed non-logical (Atkinson, 1997; Fox, 1994; McLaren, 1994). Furthermore, an educational ideal of an objective, rational student is constructed, containing the possibility of detachment, disconnection, and aloofness towards objects in the pursuit of objectivity (Clinchy, 1994; Martin, 1992; Walters, 1994).

While scholars have engaged in issues surrounding critical thinking as a subset of logic, and others have envisioned ways in which critical thinking ought or ought not be taught, my focus takes a different trajectory: in this article, I am concerned with understanding the historical trajectory of critical thinking as a discourse within an institutionalized setting, a discourse that situates Phil XX1 in dialogue with a failed curriculum initiative within the same institution forty years prior. Critiquing the trans-historical idealization of critical thinking runs the risk of performing this similar trans-historical movement, critiquing critical thinking for what it abstractly 'is.' Within this article, rather, I attempt to contextualize the *local operationalization* of critical-thinking curriculum and practices through a case study of SFU. With reference to two short historical time periods – 1964 to 1971 and 2000 to 2012 – two forms of critical thinking prevalent within undergraduate curriculum are narrated as interrelated discourses. This project delves into critical thinking's past in order to illuminate, or, more properly, *destabilize*, how it may be understood in the present. Rather than speak to the 'what' of critical thinking, through genealogical analysis I thus seek to show the 'how' of critical thinking, by excavating its 'when.'

Tracing the Discourses of Curriculum through Genealogy

Michel Foucault (1972) addresses how discourses function as framing devices, ontologically stipulating examination, judgment, measurement, and control. Rather than purely representing phenomena, discourses establish relations of inclusion and exclusion, stabilizing, fixing, and ordering phenomena through socially constructed sets of relations. Statements, practices, and institutions gain meaning, often through the perception of a self-evident reality. The reiteration of discursive practices establishes norms and rules determining admissible discussions, forms of language, criteria for judgment, legitimate speakers and admissible addressees (Foucault, 1977a). If discursive practices are understood as circumscribing social spaces, emphasis must be placed on examining the concrete effects that materialize within the spaces themselves; that is, a discourse only “means” something to the extent to which its effects are material, marking the social world. Examining discourse is thus not a process of uprooting or uncovering clandestine or essential meaning (i.e. the concept of critical thinking). Rather, focus is placed on the external conditions under which a given discourse emerges and develops in order to address the multiple forms of constraint functioning to “discipline” and shape meaning through social relations of power (Foucault, 1980, pp. 114-122).

If critical thinking is thus understood as a discourse, then the practice of genealogy can help to unearth its historical particulars. A focal point within genealogical analysis is the *effect* discourse has, from how a subject or object is discussed or represented, to how it is produced, altered, or rejected (Bell, 1993; Carabine, 2001). Tracing a discourse historically exposes the various ways it is understood, constituted, and produced, restabilising “...the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of domination” (Foucault, 1977b, p. 83). Genealogy is not a process of historicizing an idealized evolutionary continuity or revealing the essence of historical change, but rather becomes “effective” to the degree to which it locates discontinuity that destabilizes what is understood to be known. Through considering the procedures, practices, apparatuses, and institutions involved in the production of knowledge, analysis moves from understanding discourse as emergent, to the disruptions, contingencies, and subjugated knowledge through its operationalization. This is found in the “acute manifestation” of a discourse through seemingly singular and random events, moments not “reduced to accentuate their essential traits” through genealogy, but addressed to show their entanglement with “forces operating in history” (1977b, p. 88-89). Genealogy can be used to uproot the attempt to historicize curriculum as part of a progressive disciplinary trajectory through situating it within the fractures and fragments of its real efficacy—a point to which I will return in the conclusion.

Discourses of critical thinking and the way in which they operate both semantically and pragmatically in curriculum at SFU have a history that can be unearthed from the archives of the university itself. In approaching my problem, I explored archives that were concerned with cultivating the ‘critical’ in university students, focusing on locating historical moments when critical thinking was not simply used within curriculum, but came to impact pedagogy and structures of higher education. The first moment I have constructed is based upon research within one publically available fonds containing approximately five hundred documents, including letters, memos, lectures, teaching material, tests, research, publications, and pictures, that told the story of the turbulent establishment of the Reading and Study Centre (RSC) at SFU

in 1963, and the short career of its first director, Margaret Hayward. Fast-forwarding into the future, I explored a more contemporary historical moment when critical thinking curriculum was involved in a movement to restructure degree requirements, resulting in the massification of Phil XX1. Examining this second historical moment involved analyzing the documents produced by the task force behind this initiative in order to narrate how the discourse of critical thinking is utilized to address the relative worth of a degree offered at SFU. Finally, further document analysis explored the course outline, the textbook, and the PowerPoints used within Phil XX1 to consider critical-thinking curriculum in its present state.²

To research critical thinking at a single institution as if a life history were being charted may seem to some readers as strange. Stranger still, understanding a study of critical thinking through work that draws upon only two short time periods is certainly incomplete. However, as Foucault (1977b) argues, genealogy seeks to record events “outside any monotonous finality [...] in the most unpromising places, in which we tend to feel is without history” (p. 76). Indeed, as I will attempt to illustrate throughout this paper, critical thinking as a subset of rational thinking is represented as largely autonomous with respect to cultural, social, disciplinary and historical conditions and constraints. Genealogy is a process of identifying and demonstrating precisely the culturally specific history of such an understanding itself. By isolating different moments when the discourse of critical thinking appeared, one finds that “there is ‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated” (Foucault, 1977b, p. 78). Thus, the methodological pursuit of this work is to disturb what is considered immobile or universal—to unveil critical thinking’s banal, bizarre and *specific* history at a single institute.

The Establishment of the Reading and Study Centre at SFU, 1963-1971

In March 1963, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia gave its formal assent for the establishment of a new university in Vancouver, appointing Gordon Shrum as the chancellor (Johnston, 2005; Pound, 2005). The university was rapidly built and established, opening in September 1965 with 2,500 students (Johnston, 2005). The previous system of a single provincial university with affiliated colleges was overturned in favour of multiple degree-granting universities, marking a historically important moment of expansion within Canadian higher education. Echoing Cold War justifications, the expansion of higher education was seen as vital to economic development and technological advantage, and the post-war boom period entailed state expansion of higher education elsewhere – such as in the creation of the “Shakespeare Seven” in England (Johnston, 2005). Not only was the speed at which SFU was built precipitous, but this new university was ostensibly untethered from other systems of higher education in the province at that time, an attribute of autonomy that seemed to warrant the establishment of innovative programs. As the detailed planning of SFU began only twenty-five months prior to opening, public speculation followed the creation of this “instant university” and “degree factory,” as novelty was concomitant with haste (Johnston, 2005).

One major challenge in establishing SFU was faculty recruitment. While approximately 120 new faculty members were needed, Canada’s pool of eligible professors and graduate students was relatively small at that time (Johnston, 2005). During the 1950s, out of Canada’s

thirty-two English speaking colleges and universities, only the University of Toronto ran a full graduate school that encompassed multiple disciplines. Further, the second largest university in the country – the University of British Columbia (UBC) – had only just begun awarding PhD degrees at this time. While graduate students in the natural sciences were more numerous, by the 1960s, under seventy-five students yearly earned PhDs in the social sciences and humanities in Canada (Johnston, 2005). The establishment of SFU was a moment of opportunity for many who were looking for permanent positions. Margaret Hayward – who had completed one year of graduate work at UBC and earned a master’s degree in psychology from Western Reserve University– saw an opportunity for one of these positions.

In November 1963, Margaret Hayward wrote Shrum recommending that a “reading service” be established at the new university (Hayward, November 29, 1963). Hayward, whose employment at UBC had been limited for over twelve years by policy that denied her academic rank due to being a daughter and a wife of UBC professors, had established an informal reading improvement service while being an instructor in the Department of Psychology. In this letter, Hayward highlights that a reading and study centre would generate “first class students,” something she had witnessed as “whole university careers were changed by a few weeks of reading instruction.” Further, she states in this initial letter that her efforts to establish such a centre at UBC had been unsuccessful, as “the Administration has felt that such instruction was not a university responsibility.” Even in this first letter – and subsequently in the later planning and formation of the RSC that resulted from its sending – providing a “service” to students was noted as serving ancillary purposes within the university but holding an uncertain place within higher education.

Only four days after the initial letter was sent by Hayward, Chancellor Shrum replied, expressing his desire to organize a reading program at SFU (Shrum, December 3, 1963). On January 6, 1964, the appointed president, P.D. McTaggart-Cowan, wrote to Hayward describing his interest in a “properly organized program for improving the reading habits of University students” (McTaggart-Cowan, June 6, 1964). Enthusiasm for the service continued, and by June 1964 the Board of Governors had approved the RSC and the appointment of Hayward as the director (McTaggart-Cowan, June 17, 1964).

While the curriculum and programs proposed by Hayward were quickly accepted, issues arose in deciding the location of the centre. As the decision was considered to be disciplinary, the assessment of which discipline would house the RSC was postponed until all departmental Deans had been hired and could be consulted. While by August 1963 the RSC was placed in the Department of Psychology, the centre itself was continually stressed to be non-disciplinary bound. L.M. Kendall, Dean of Psychology, discussed in a report the need for the services offered by the RSC to be free from identification with a specific discipline:

To function most effectively it is important that the service be as free as possible of identification with any one faculty or specific discipline. Students of all departments of the University must feel free to seek or to be referred to a Service that is not, in their minds, linked with the disciplinary structure of the University. Only under these circumstances can a student be confident that the Reading and Study courses are offered primarily for their personal benefit. (Kendall, August 19, 1965)

As this letter emphasizes, the RSC was to be associated with the Department of Psychology for “administrative purposes” only. While Hayward’s own educational background was in psychology, and undeniably influenced her work and the course material she produced, the curriculum offered by the RSC was from the beginning considered outside the disciplinary bounds of sanctioned psychology curriculum.

Within the establishment of the RSC, disciplinary-specific knowledge was avoided, while the discourse of “service” to all students was forefront. Academic literacies, largely focused on traditional text-based literacy, were considered sets of skills that students could acquire through taking a RSC course designed to aid students in meeting the demands of university study. As Thomas Masters (2004) argues, “instrumentality” marked academic literacies in the post-war period, and they were largely taught as learning “instruments” for use within multiple disciplines, differentiated from disciplinary-specific knowledge (p. 30). Resonating with this conception of what academic literacies *were* and *were not*, no course credit was received through the programs offered by the RSC, something Hayward strongly opposed during and after its establishment. As McTaggart-Cowan wrote to Hayward, “courses of a remedial nature offered generally to undergraduates would not be for credit” (McTaggart-Cowan, June 17, 1964). The services offered by the RSC were trapped in a paradoxical position: by offering skills and knowledge deemed necessary *prior* to disciplinary-bound knowledge, the centre was situated outside that very knowledge. As Masters writes, the universality of academic literacies “could not claim any particular content as its own, and so it was confined to the margins of academic discourse” (2004, p. 24).

Critical Reading, Listening, Writing, and Thinking

The main course offered by the RSC was entitled Reading and Study 001, advertised in brochures around campus through the symbol of a mathematical equation regarding reading: “rate = purpose + difficulty” (*Reading and study centre brochure*, n.d.). This course focused on reading improvement, centering on increasing reading efficiency through reading-rate flexibility that was based on the presumed relationship between learning purpose and text difficulty. Reading speed was linked to improved comprehension, as the same brochure publicized “aggressive techniques to speed up comprehension.” The centre sought to change “rigid ineffectual reading and study habits” and expose students to new techniques and skills in order to develop a “systematic study approach” (Hayward & Franklin, n.d.). All students, regardless of their discipline of study, could learn skills that would improve comprehension and study habits *efficiently* through critical reading, listening, writing, and thinking.

Discussions of critical thinking, writing, listening and reading were widely found in course and study material offered by the RSC. Rather than simply a distinct analytical ability, critical thinking was discussed in connection to different communication skills, primarily listening, writing, and reading. Given that the main focus of the RSC was on improving the reading ability of students, “critical reading” was the most extensively discussed out of all forms of communication. Critical reading was advocated by the centre as the highest “level of reading”: whereas the first level of reading was “literal understanding,” and the second level “interpretation,” the highest level of reading, “critical reading,” was described as a process

whereby the reader would evaluate and pass judgement on quality, value, and accuracy of what was read (*Levels of reading*, n.d.).

The literacy of evaluating and passing judgement was also found within lectures on “critical listening.” Resonating with Post-War discourses, one particular lecture warned students to “watch for common propaganda appeals” while arguing that students needed an “attitude of critical thinking to combat the tendency for the prestige of the speaker to influence you in accepting his promises” (*Lecture V*, 1966). Likewise, one self-diagnostic test asked students to self-rate their ability to “detect propaganda” (*Factors relating to your reading ability*, n.d.). An article found among fonds documents on critical reading described the need for college students to become critical in “self defence” against the “semantic flood pouring from presses and electronic sound devices” (Cameron, 1968, p. 26). Students were taught to discriminate and differentiate in order to judge the “worth” of an article through reading for “logic.” As one lecture read, “if a student’s thinking is illogical he can do as much harm as if he were deliberately malicious” (*Critical reading lecture*, 1966).

Within course material, “critical reading” was largely separated from “creative reading,” described as involving “fantasy” and “free association” (*Developing creative reading*, n.d.). Creative reading was considered a way to bring about new insights, or a modification of values through attributes such as curiosity, empathy, and originality (*Lecture IX*, 1966). Critical reading, which “demands censorship, appraisal and judgement,” is conducted in order to “appraise, evaluate and form judgements” (*Developing creative reading*, n.d.). Nevertheless, given the focus on “flexibility” and the ability for students to move easily between different learning strategies, course material attempted to move beyond dichotomous understandings between critical and creative reading, and advocated for these skills to be learned in conjunction, knowing when to read critically or creatively. As one lecture informed students, critical reading is “a creative process that helps you to develop a scale of values you can apply to the written word” (*Critical Reading Lecture*, 1966).

The Academic Legitimacy of the Reading and Study Centre

Less than three years after the RSC opened, the Psychology Advisory Committee deemed the RSC to be an inappropriate affiliate within their department. As the Dean of Psychology highlighted, the RSC offered “general education” courses that did not fit with the “experimental outlook of general orientation of the department,” and the training and experience required for RSC staff differed from other faculty members (Lyman, February 28, 1968). After pressure from the Lyman, the President’s Advisory Committee determined soon after that the RSC should be moved to the Faculty of Arts as a temporary arrangement (Strand, June 7, 1971). Hayward quickly objected, protesting that the new space offered was only half the previous size, and that the cost of relocation was yet to be provided (Hayward, June 1, 1970). As Hayward wrote in this letter, “surely it would be more economical to hire new faculty members to improve our teaching rather than waste such sums on an unnecessary move.” Crucially, it was precisely what the RSC taught, and where this curriculum *fit*, that was under question.

The centre’s move to the Faculty of Arts was short-lived, and by 1971 the Board of Governors had decided that the centre should not be tied to an academic faculty at all but instead

be a division of the newly established University Services. On April 14th of that year, Vice-President B.G. Wilson wrote to Hayward to reassure her that there were no immediate consequences to the centre and the service it offered other than a change of reporting channels (Wilson, April 14, 1971). Wilson highlighted in this letter that while university services personnel do not have faculty rank, Hayward would not have to contend with tenure considerations and her appointment would be continued indefinitely. With her academic rank challenged, Hayward responded to this restructuring of the centre by calling for an academic assessment of the RSC by members of the university community and outside referees to determine if “academic accreditation” of the RSC should be removed (Strand, June 7, 1971). In response, president K. Stand described the term “academic accreditation” confusing, as no academic credit had ever been given for the courses offered by the RSC, further stating that the “administrative location of the RSC has been tentative since the outset” (Strand, June 7, 1971). While the RSC had been able to align itself with the Department of Psychology in the establishment of this new university, the maturation and the concretization of disciplinary boundaries made this no longer possible.

When the move of the RSC had been finalized three-months later, Hayward resigned, citing reasons directly related to the diminution in status of her centre and position. In a letter to the university president, Hayward highlights that she accepted the position to establish the RSC on the basis that it would “contribute to *academic* excellence,” and through moving the centre from functioning within a discipline to becoming a university service its academic status was reduced, “destroying” the most valuable aspects of her work and research (Hayward, July 26, 1971, *emphasis added*). Hayward asserts that RSC course curriculum taught academic skills that could “be effectively developed only as part of a student’s academic program.” Finally, the letter concludes with her resignation: as she writes, “these recent administrative actions render the terms of my employment at SFU no longer acceptable to me. I shall continue my research in this field however, regrettably, not as a member of your faculty.”

Contemporary Practices of Critical Thinking, 2000-2012

While the RSC continued without Hayward, the services and curriculum that were offered changed dramatically in the coming years. Today the centre does not exist, but is closely related to the Student Learning Commons, a centre that provides learning and study aid through workshops, print resources, personal consultations, and peer support. While critical thinking curriculum is found within some workshops, unlike the RSC it is not explicitly centered within teaching and learning practices. However, critical thinking – albeit, in a specific form– has increased in profile throughout the same university through the massification of Phil XX1. Instead of being used as a means to efficiently increase the learning capabilities of students, critical thinking, as this next section will show, has found not only legitimation with the discipline of philosophy, but has also been mandated by the university in order to increase the perceived value of all degrees offered.

The incredibly high enrollment of students in Phil XX1 is due to a special “qualitative” or “Q” designation allotted by the university to this course. Beginning in fall 2006, all students were required to complete a minimum of 36 credits of courses designated as “writing,”

“qualitative,” or “breadth” – degree requirements based upon recommendations made by an undergraduate curriculum initiative committee established in spring 2000. This committee, citing “technological and cultural change, the rapid creation of new information, a larger and more diverse student body, [and] conflicting sets of expectations on the part of social and political institutions” set out to evaluate and strengthen undergraduate curriculum within SFU (*Project History*, n.d.). The issue of mass information “pouring from presses and electronic sound devices” seems to be unresolved, and the advent of new technology, an increase of international students, and wider social expectations, are cited as reasons why “increased difficulty” is found in “offering students a relevant, effective and coherent education.” As publicised by the committee, changes to degree requirements were constituted in order for the university to provide a “superior education, with greater applicability and relevance, and better preparation for careers” (*Writing, quantitative and breadth requirements*, n.d.).

“Q” courses are understood to “assist students to develop quantitative (numerical, geometric) or formal (deductive, probabilistic) reasoning, and to develop skills in practical problem solving, critical evaluation, or analysis” (*Writing, quantitative and breadth requirements*, n.d.). Many of these courses centre on statistical and mathematic skills; nevertheless, other courses, like Phil XX1, have been designed “especially for students in the Humanities and Fine Arts” and seek “not simply to nurture traditional math skills” but “aspire to the greater challenge of deepening the understanding and appreciation of qualitative and formal reasoning, their ubiquitous utility, and their creative potential” (*Quantitative*, n.d.). It is through this initiative that Phil XX1 is provided academic legitimacy in a way the courses offered by the RSC never were, normalizing the *specific* form that critical thinking has taken. This reclassification of course credit not only sets a standard students must meet, but sets a required standard of what must be taught – what constitutes a “quantitative” requirement. Changing little from term-to-term, even with different instructors, Phil XX1 teaches a starkly specific, scientific form of critical thinking, standardized departmentally and institutionally.

The curriculum changes that resulted from the recommendations put forth by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee are presented as mechanisms of student learning “enhancement” rather than substantial changes to curriculum or a restructuring of the degree system. As the committee writes, “we have tried to propose mechanisms of implementation that are sufficiently flexible to accommodate change as non-disruptively as possible” (AHCC, 2002, p.1). Rather, classes that currently existed from a range of previously established departments were reclassified to merit credit that would meet an established requirement for all awarded degrees. Unlike the RSC, the discursive framing of critical-thinking curriculum within Phil XX1 indicates not a “service” for students; rather, the committee that instigated this change focused on “enhancing” undergraduate programs through considering what constitutes a university education and an educated individual. As discussed in the committee’s 2002 report, an educated person should be able to express him/herself effectively, specifically in speech and writing, be “competent in the language and techniques of formal quantitative expression,” and have the ability to understand, “critically evaluate,” “formulate,” and “advance” quantitatively-based arguments (AHCC, 2002, p. 5). Critical thinking as a component of undergraduate education and a quality of an ‘educated person’ is emphasised, yet rather than a skill that will provide aid to students within their university programs, critical thinking is discussed as a requirement to produce an educated subject. Importantly, this educated subject is curiously linked to

institutional standards themselves: as the committee asserts, “we cannot expect students to be attracted to SFU because they will be required to fulfill general education requirements. Students will be attracted to SFU because an SFU degree certifies a high quality education” (p. 3). The critical, educated subject is both assumed and produced by the curriculum initiative at SFU.

Recontextualizing the Present: Dialogue Between Curriculum and History

In considering these two historical time periods, it becomes apparent that critical thinking as an academic literacy and a skill deemed requisite for success within higher education has been increasingly separated, fragmented, and isolated from other skill sets at SFU. Within the RSC, critical thinking was linked directly to modes of academic communication that were considered to be needed for greater success within high education: critical listening, critical reading and critical writing. While RSC curriculum discursively privileged academic literacies in their “critical” form, they were taught as some of the many proficiencies required by university students. Critical thinking in its contemporary form has been further separated and fragmented from other possible academic literacies or ways of generating knowledge. Given the “quantitative” designation this class must meet, it would be seemingly unthinkable to teach critical thinking alongside “creative thinking,” as the RSC proposed to do. Recent restructuring of degree requirements has led to not only further academic legitimacy, but to critical thinking understood as an academic *requirement*, divorced from its specific applicability in contextually bound problems. The discourse of critical thinking has been increasingly universalized, and rather than being discussed as primarily an academic literacy that will aid students in their academic careers, is largely viewed as a quantitative, scientific, rational mode of thought an educated individual ought to possess.

The history of the emergence of critical thinking as a discourse within the structure of degree granting is a history of disjuncture. While in the contemporary case critical thinking curriculum has come to impact the university structure itself, its roots are found in the bastardization of its mode of implementation as a “service,” a designation that ironically led to its marginalization. Critical thinking at SFU today is normalized as a degree requirement, discursively imbedded in curriculum and pedagogical practices. Critical-thinking curriculum, as taught in the Department of Philosophy, may never face the same problematization as the RSC, as it offers knowledge legitimated through its disciplinary lineage – perhaps as far back as the Socratic injunction to “know thyself.” Simultaneously, a small subset of what is offered by the Department of Philosophy has been massified, now boasting the largest enrollment of any class offered, and undoubtedly shaping the department, from its funding structure and hiring policies, to how the discipline itself is understood by students.

At the same time Phil XX1 became a required course, elevated to the level of sanctioned curriculum, critical thinking’s original, disjointed application—combining reading, listening, writing, and thinking—was distilled under the consideration of what makes an educated subject “excellent.” Critical thinking as a skill that may aid university study has been replaced by its attribution as embodied within students as they embark into the world beyond university with their degrees in hand. Yet for critical thinking to rise to this status has meant its silencing in

other forms. This is what Foucault would highlight as the production of truth “only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint” (1980, p. 131). When a technical skill is rendered as a “quality” that may or may not be embodied by a subject, it is impacted by the forms of constraint that legitimate it. We see it today not needing to battle for its place in the university, as Hayward needed to do, but its appearance in a form thoroughly legitimated precisely through the regime of truth that renders it applicable in a narrowly specific way.

The discourse of critical thinking, as a reflection of and agent within the politics of truth—what Foucault describes as “the types of discourse which [a society] accepts and makes function as true” (1980, p. 131)—is a reflection of a certain movement within curriculum inquiry. Historicizing current critical-thinking curriculum—which at first glance may be seemingly immutable, the product of rational thought processes—addresses the false neutrality that it superficially purports. Current critical-thinking curriculum is just one form of many that has passed through the university, attempting in many ways to still grapple with the questions of the past: from how to aid students in their university studies, to how to reckon with the mass amounts of information and possible propaganda that may exist. Critical-thinking curriculum is not on a progressive pathway towards a more “educated” subject, nor does it form a universal narrative; rather, it has a specific relationship with the space and time in which it appeared, and continues to appear.

Within this article, I have attempted to address a way in which conceptualizing curriculum involves not simply understanding the historical and contextual lineage of institutionalized curriculum initiatives, but retelling it in order to recontextualize the present. While methodologically genealogy is limited in its ability to account for the actors who have been the agents of history, it can nevertheless gesture towards them by highlighting the disjuncture their stories engender. The story of Margaret Hayward, for example, provides a more contentious history of critical thinking at SFU than can otherwise be appreciated. While individual lives, choices, and institutional change have been pieced together through document analysis, this can only provide an incomplete story. Yet genealogy as a methodology does more than simply provide historical accounts. As has been addressed, linear narratives of the massification of critical thinking curriculum are disrupted through unpacking the frames of reference carried from the past into curriculum today. A grand historical narrative of critical thinking within SFU may have breezed over the account Margaret Hayward left in the archive of the institution that rejected her effort as a scholar and educator. Genealogy, as a historical methodology, shows the importance of her account within wider understandings of critical thinking curriculum and academic legitimacy.

Charting the relationship knowledge has with space and time through genealogy is what Foucault (1977b) describes as the process of writing an “effective” history. The destabilizing effect this has intends to uproot the tradition foundations of knowledge and “...disrupt its pretended continuity” (p. 154). Critical-thinking curriculum is indeed not ahistorical or universal in nature, nor is knowledge achieved in a single form through meeting credit requirements. Critical-thinking knowledge is context-specific even as it purports not to be. However, the purpose of this research is not to understand what critical thinking is or is not; as Foucault writes, “this is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” (1977b, p. 154). Genealogy allows for a small slice to be made through the penchant to universalize critical-thinking curriculum and knowledge. As this paper exposed, the discourse of critical thinking

within one institutional case study has a particular, tenuous history of navigating seemingly incompatible relationships between disciplinary-bound knowledge, student service, and academic legitimacy. Today, this tension is ostensibly ameliorated, as critical thinking curriculum is situated within departmental and disciplinary boundaries that provide academic legitimacy. Nevertheless, as genealogy demonstrates, these “events on the stage of historical process” are continuous in form, and thus never complete (Foucault, 1977b, p. 86).

Notes

¹ For critiques of this position see, Norris, 1990; Paul 1990b; Siegel, 1990

² While data from this method is not used in this paper, I also observed a number of classes after seeking permission from the course instructor. Currently, I am in the early stages of considering how genealogy and ethnography may traverse under a single methodology.

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