The Im/Possible Ethos of Curriculum Work

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Ethos: /eethoss/ • **noun** the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community.— ORIGIN Greek *ethos* 'nature, disposition.'

IN THE INTRODUCTION to *Intellectual advancement through disciplinarity*, Bill Pinar (2007) suggests that a conversation on the disciplinarity of curriculum work, "the intellectual labor of understanding—the labor of comprehension, critique, and reconceptualization" (p. xii), be taken up. Arguing for both verticality (an intentional, intellectual history of curriculum work) and horizontality (analysis of the contemporary context within which curriculum takes place), Pinar's call brings to the fore questions related to the purposes and validity claims of those doing curriculum work, a "discipline of disciplinarity." These in turn lead to a re/investigation of the values that underpin the field, or, in other words, a re/investigation of the ethos of curriculum work.

A faculty reading group on Pinar's text provided the opportunity for scholars from multiple fields of study to explore questions related to working in curriculum. From that discussion, issues of ethics—both professional and personal—held a prominent role in how we were thinking of and about the work that we do and, as Macdonald (1995) states, "what should constitute a world

for learning and how to go about making this world" (p. 137). Our work together quickly became the project itself as we thought about how we wanted *to be* together as a community: an ethos. The ethos of the "world for learning" we wanted to create proved to be a way we could think of curriculum work in relational, interpersonal ways, intertwined with the multiple projects of identity that are always, already underway.

Our identities as faculty converge through eclectic backgrounds and pathways into and out of our respective practices within our academic work and our teaching. In this collective investigation of ethos, given the mutuality of fields, of disciplines, and of the academic structures in which we reside, we have become "a band of eccentrics collaborating for purposes of mutual protection rather than as a band of fellow spirits united by a common goal" (Rorty, 1989, p. 59). This stance is, outwardly grounded in our status as untenured junior and clinical faculty and manifests itself as an experiment in the intellectual investigations of curriculum work. The pursuit of mutual protection is the desire for intellectual community, for peer-mentorship, for creating the cultures of which we wish to be a part. The exploration provides a rich environment to better understand our intellectual heritages, our present context, and our relationships to each other.

The state of the field of curriculum is, yet again, and is perhaps always so, under scrutiny and, as many curriculum workers find themselves outside of the field proper, the vitality of curriculum scholarship and the institutional structures that make it possible are under investigation (i.e., the AAACS Survey on the Status of Curriculum Studies). The mutual protection we seek however lies in broader concerns of the interpersonal-intellectual work of academic colleagues in an age of encroaching accountability systems, technicist views of teaching and learning, and bureaucratic limitations. Our approach to the question of the state of the field is to simply offer our experiences as exemplars for consideration. The process is, as Shubert (2009) called for, "to challenge traditions and deconstruct the disciplinarity through diverse venues of practice as we advance the field of curriculum studies…a heuristic for deliberation over inclusions and exclusions drawn from our possible pasts and in view of possible futures" (p. 136–137).

In an effort to expand on the vitality of our engagement with Pinar's charge, we sought to push the conversation, following Shubert's model, by exploring a series of questions that would begin to make public the deliberations of our individual and collective ethos of curriculum work. The following questions served as the initial entree to this discussion: What does it mean to be a curriculum worker? How did we learn to be who we are as curriculum workers? What are and what are we to do with the boundaries both highlighted and transgressed in Pinar's disciplinarity? What im/possibilities are implied in this "ethos of curriculum work?"

The first stage of exploration began as a panel presentation at the 2008 Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice. Each of the authors prepared individual responses to each question and presented them in a round-robin format. Our intention was an exchange that was fluid, emergent, and dialogic as each response built upon the other's comments. This process allowed us to learn from one another and engage with those who attended the session in the spirit of both taking the field and history of curriculum work seriously and seeking out openings for the new, the transcendent, the space of possibility. We hoped to take up the challenge of Janet Miller (2005)—an argument for an ethos—as we explored with one another:

> We must *work* our relationships to one another if we are to construct and reconstruct the curriculum field as an on-going and human project, incapable of closure yet dedicated to

taking action in order to create what "should be and what might be." (Emphasis in original, p. 213)

The present iteration of that *work* traces the individual commentary that reflects a struggle for, and against, our individual disciplines as they make sense inside of a shared ethos. For the most part the text here remains unchanged from that initial dialogue, and we offer a series of introductions to frame the themes we see emerging. We each draw from personal history, the unique fields from which we emerged as scholars, and the external realities in which those histories are made. Thus, we follow, to an extent, Pinar's call for verticality by making our own "claims" to the work. At the same time, this interwoven discussion reveals the current conditions in which we practice our scholarship and pedagogy, and how our surroundings and interactions create horizontality, which becomes part of our ethos. The im/possibilities that are then implied through this ethos is work that is provisional, contingent, and ultimately bound by commitment, not only to discipline, but also to the mutual protection of our common purpose.

What Does It Mean to Be a Curriculum Worker?

In consideration of this question, our responses reflect the need to find our footing and stake our claims to the idea of curriculum work. We each acknowledge in our own ways the discomfort we have with certain aspects of defining our work with any certainty, but the investigation reveals that the curriculum work as we ultimately define it consists of three key themes. First is an assumption of meaning and power that recognizes who or what has shaped and will shape the meaning of work for us individually. Next, we describe the work as dangerous and sometimes deadly—the process of dissecting and describing what it means to do this work can fall into extremes that make us hesitate. Whether we see our process as reductive or generative, the tentative and provisional nature of curriculum work leads each of us to a state of questioning our relationships to meaning and power. Finally, we recognize the critical nature of intellectual engagement with ideas, with each other, and with students leads to this idea of constantly questioning the fruitful grounds on which we base our practice.

Helfenbein: This is dangerous ground. Taking up the claim of curriculum work is fraught with a history of the field that has been both fruitful and, at times, tiresome. Certainly one could approach this through deconstructions of the term "work" and the attendant meanings of being a "worker." Thoughtfully taken up by Gaztambide-Fernandez, Sloan, Franck, McDermott, & Gershon (2006), the only conclusion to their framing question of "is curriculum work?" is maybe. To their credit, they rightly acknowledge that their varied responses to the question are meant to be productive, to be generative, to *work*.

Perhaps the way to think through what it means to be a curriculum worker might best be thought of in terms of the productive and of the generative. The idea that as scholars working around issues that may be considered curriculum issues we take up a project that aims to do something in the world. Thinking about ethos and about core commitments takes me back to my personal introduction to curriculum theorizing: the reading of *Bitter Milk*. In it, Grumet (1988) states,

Curriculum expresses the desire to establish a world for children that is richer, larger, more colorful, and more accessible than the one we have known…The curriculum, in this

conception, becomes tentative and provisional, a temporary and negotiated settlement between the lives we are capable of living and the ones we have. (p. xii–xiii)

In this way then, curriculum necessarily derives from an ethos—a collective spirit or disposition related to this world-in-the-making. But of course, Grumet also points to the rootedness of curriculum in desire, a dissatisfaction with the world we have known, and this too may point to an ethos and it may be one that we curriculum workers work against.

Scribner: I come to this project as faculty in an educational leadership program where I teach courses in organizational theory, moral dimensions of leadership, school-community relations, and politics of education. So, I approach this question applying these lenses to make sense of Macdonald's "world for learning" we endeavor to make—while wrestling with the baggage and debates occurring within the educational leadership circles about how these worlds should get "made" and for what purpose. To do so, I have to consider how organizational questions are curricular questions, particularly in exploring the meaning of *the work*.

When I think about the organizational world, I begin with Scott's (1998) basic elements: goals, boundaries, structure, participants, technology, and adding to this list, leadership. The *work* of understanding and negotiating these worlds only begins here. The work is in making the study of organizations *matter* (Flyvbjerg, 2006). That is, moving beyond reflecting (like mirrors) what these elements look like in a given context, and asking: Who stands to gain or lose in the contests over organizational goals? Who sets or spans boundaries—and what are these boundaries "made of?" How do structures (formal and informal) privilege or marginalize participants? And, how do the participants influence all of these elements?

It seems to me that the *curriculum work* is embedded in these questions. As I consider such work, from my position [in a school of education at a university], it is the meaning of our *work* in, with, (on?) schools that demand self-critical reflection on matters like: (a) how we span boundaries in partnership work, and create spaces in which functionalist assumptions of school-university partnership activities and agendas are contested; (b) how these organizational intersections are by nature political spaces; (c) how institutional constraints on engaging in such boundary spanning (and sometimes subversive) work are stretched [or snapped?]; (d) how we understand and live the relationship between work and identity.

Thus, working the ethos may be in finding spaces in which participants can co-create a "world for learning" in which autonomy as learners and educators is sought/nurtured/achieved, rather than controlled where the advantaging and disadvantaging of participants is brought to the foreground and where organizing is by definition ethical.

Keller: Curriculum work for me involves meeting my students part way in, to borrow Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) term, a *borderlands* of sorts, in which my students and I interact as we cross over into the tenuous territories of each other's identities, reshaping, reforming, and reaffirming. As we move fluidly back and forth, open to what arises from those spaces for creative and critical thought, we grow and develop, in a forward and backward motion as we attempt to make sense, together, of our worlds and our world. My scholarship in social foundations of education informs this process, as does my scholarship of teaching. At times the two intertwine; my research on service-learning, both local and international, affords me the opportunity to examine from a sociological perspective the outcomes of student growth in a process that, for some, places them in a totally unfamiliar space. This work in turn helps shape my teaching and further research. At other times, my scholarship seems somewhat more distant from, though capable of informing, my teaching. For instance, when I take on a philosophical piece of work, while it has

the potential to indirectly offer insight to my teaching, it more directly serves me in what I consider to be an exercise of intellectual engagement for the sake of intellectual engagement. Perhaps purpose is key here. There are times when I wish to entertain social foundations research just because I value the particular discipline(s) for its/their own sake. This practice is keeping alive a crucial element of my own intellectual identity.

Magee: Technically, I was a chemist, before becoming an educator. The ideas I express here are ones that have been strongly shaped by two worlds: science and education. For me being a curriculum worker means thinking purposefully (with intention), deeply (in multiple ways), and critically (from a "who has the power?" perspective) about how my courses are lived (mentally and physically) by both my students and by me. As a curriculum worker in multiple contexts, I constantly interrogate the choices and motivations for requests I make of my students and myself. The interrogation includes questions such as: Who benefits from this experience? Who is marginalized? Who has chosen this experience? How challenged are my students or I to identify assumptions that we have about what we think we know and can do?

In the above questions "experience" encompasses the more obvious signs of the curriculum—assignments, readings, and classroom activities. But it also includes practices that are not so easily seen: decision-making power, use of physical space, and questioning the immediate acceptance of traditionally held beliefs about the world. As a chemistry student in the science classroom, these practices were not evident to me, nor were they invoked to help me use science to critically make sense of the world. As a science educator I am compelled to include these things in my work and to develop classroom experiences that challenge my students to think about science in this way.

Wood: To be a curriculum worker is to struggle with, in, and around the discovery of meaning, and fulfills the multiple possibilities of that meaning. I am reminded of acclaimed director Peter Brook's (1968) classic work, *The Empty Space,* where theatre is divided into four distinct, yet intertwining categories—the deadly, the holy, the rough, and the immediate. These easily translate into roles of a curriculum worker. The *deadly* curriculum worker is where we find ourselves when time is tight, when we forget to think, or just need to get it done. This is the curriculum worker who plows ahead often without great thought or consideration and brings a plodding, moribund practice that focuses on the "shoulds" and the "oughts." The *holy* curriculum worker is one who dwells in the possibilities, testing and probing the context for various truths and consequences, for inspiration and for self-reflection. The *rough* curriculum worker is closest to the people, works from within the context and the relationship to bring about change. Sometimes rejecting the bureaucracy, or the discipline, the rough curriculum worker always keeps the people in her sights and doesn't always look back. The *immediate* curriculum worker takes things as they unfold, moves in and out of the context to build practical considerations and sensibilities, and watches for the right time to act and make action possible. I see myself in each of these, embracing for the most part that which is holy, rough, and immediate, and sadly from time to time I let myself be compelled to fit into the narrow channel of the deadly curriculum worker.

How Did We Learn to Be Who We Are as Curriculum Workers?

As we expand our conception of curriculum work, our ability to examine how we learned what we know is shaped more by our recognition of where the work is played out rather than

who we are. Some chose the word "borderlands," echoing Anzaldúa, others claiming a border crossing in the mode of Giroux, each definition burdened with its own interpretations and assumptions; the fundamental essence of the discussion here is that of in-between. We learned how to be curriculum workers when we set foot into the in-between of disciplines. Wrestling with this realization that we both are and are not what we think we are, the in-betweens of the work become a part of our teaching, our research, or our intellectual engagements.

Scribner: As a graduate student one of my professors told me, "Your problem is you have one foot in curriculum and one foot in [educational leadership]." I remember feeling both perplexed (as if one could separate the two) and awakened to a sort of tug of war I had become— I got different books to read, different directions, sent into what I was being told were different worlds. This was also a moment at which I was reminded that I have always identified as border dweller. In my professional lives, I have chosen that space. I am bicultural—Mexican/White— and bilingual. I enjoyed a teaching career as a bilingual teacher, much of the time teaching in portable buildings at the edge of campus. I was an administrator at an urban high school that housed in a school-within-a-school magnet—a school with a long history of conflict around race and resources. I have studied art, American studies, and administration and been mentored throughout by scholars of curriculum and organizations. I have spent significant time living in the Northeast, Southwest, and the West Coast. I am a member of a leadership program that spans two campuses. Much of my work thus far, my research, is in the context of school-university and school-community partnerships, where I am constantly moving among my identities as a Latina K-12 teacher, administrator, and university researcher.

I admittedly resist belonging to one camp. Sometimes it feels like a *movimiento de rebeldía* (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999), against institutional messages communicated by colleagues and mentors pressuring the junior scholar to become more or less, all or not enough. I choose to live with one foot on the edge of here and one foot on the edge of there. But, as the borderlands imply, I am not just straddling—I am in, what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/1999) called, that "in-between space"—a space that at times is scary, but in which I find a community and develop relationships that "stoke the fire" (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999) and settle the ground of my intellectual roots.

Helfenbein: For me, the introduction to curriculum theorizing was the moment where I was pulled in contradictory directions. I was thinking that academic work didn't capture what I felt in my gut to be true about what was important in teaching. My classes in my doctoral studies were not speaking to me, and the fear that I wasn't actually smart enough to do this work persisted. I was seriously considering going back to be a social studies teacher; that I felt I could do.

Keller: My past experience in class as a student, my research, my service-learning work, and my work as a teacher inform my identity as a curriculum worker. A messy area for me in this regard is the boundary of disciplines, along which lie my social foundations research on the one side and my scholarship of teaching on the other. This is challenging most specifically when I engage in the intellectual stimulation of philosophical work that is not directly connected to my teaching.

Magee: I learned to be who I am, as a curriculum worker, by looking closely at my own life experiences (as a teacher and as a student). Willing to reconceptualize my own insecurities, weaknesses, and strengths as a human being, in the context of my own life, I have come to understand my work as a teacher. I came to science first and then to teaching. By the time I was 29 I had experienced a "full" traditional science education. I majored in chemistry in high school and college, completed a PhD in physical chemistry and rounded it out with a 3-year postdoctoral appointment. The world declared me fit to be a university teacher. But I knew better. I knew

that I was not fit. So I went *back* to school (being a student was something I knew how to do) and began my formal education to be a teacher.

What I did not foresee were the ways in which my thinking about teaching and learning would be challenged in a teacher education program. Unlike my chemistry experiences, my teacher education experiences required me to think about issues of power, injustice and bias and to consider the ramifications of my choices and the choices of others on society. I began to think about teaching as something more than what I already knew about chemistry and science. Over the last 10 years I have been able to challenge myself in ways that would not have been impossible within the walls of traditional science or within the walls of myself. Although I did not recognize it at the time, this began my life as a curriculum worker.

Wood: Throughout these discussions we frequently talked about the sources of our curriculum work's legitimacy and relevance, or obligations and our genealogies. For me it is a hodgepodge of disciplines, practices, cultures, and champions. I learned to be a deadly curriculum worker by sticking too close to what seemed to be the "right" thing to do, I was never going to be a classroom teacher—too much family history for that. Instead I realized that I was a curriculum worker, just not in some classroom somewhere. I learned how to be a holy curriculum worker through improvisational and community-based theatre where dramatic arts could be used to explore context and relationship to bring about change. I mixed and mingled these ideas and found my way into the role of immediate curriculum worker in the development and production of museum exhibits and informal learning environments. I later learned to be a rough curriculum worker by working in community youth development, by hearing and seeing young people in the world, learning to understand their lived experiences. I started to see how mixing streams of thought could bring about the kind of curriculum I cared about. My graduate programs were fringe outfits with professors, who like me, were misfits living in the in-between of fields. The real moment I realized that all these disparate pathways made sense was after reading the introduction to Ralph Ellison's (1953) *Invisible Man.* I discovered the idea of Two-Ness. Then I saw it again in Myles Horton's two-eyed educator (1990). And then I realized I was at the boundary of many ideas, and thoughts, and disciplines. And I liked being there. And, I didn't really know what that meant.

What Are and What Are We to Do with the Boundaries Both Highlighted and Transgressed in Pinar's Disciplinarity?

We each learned to be curriculum workers by discovering the boundaries of curriculum work and later by existing in-between. We know that there are limits, choices and implications in disciplinarity, but each of our responses to this question of boundaries indicates a preference for the edges where the lines between two things are blurred and rub together. In this region the boundaries are the point of our commitment to action. Those actions themselves follow similar systems of merging, blending and "mashing-up" of ideas. A healthy dose of skepticism, intellectual labor, and social commitment contribute to our ways of knowing and doing.

Scribner: Lately I have been thinking about this question of boundaries and disciplines as it relates to research in the context of school-community and school-university partnership. I have arrived at a tentative conclusion that this work within and across the boundaries of disciplines, this work that is directed toward negotiating new spaces in which to challenge the institutionally infused power relations and narrow definitions of teaching and learning that disadvantage scores

of marginalized student and teachers——the ethos of this work can be likened to the musical Mash-up.

The musical Mash-up—in its truest sense—is not just a blend or a "remix" but an integration and interlocking of more than one song from different genres to create a new experience—one which, when done well, allows us to hear and feel the parts themselves anew, as well as, and more importantly, to experience a new whole. In its simplest form, DJ's may take a vocal from a pop song, for example, and lay it over the musical tracks of another song from another genre, say alternative rock or hip-hop. This is not easy to do well, despite the accessible and user-friendly technologies. It requires a deep vocabulary of songs (a verticality so to speak)—an incisive understanding of that which constitutes each song—and thus the ability to create sentences, then stories, sometimes arguments based on intimate attention to various elements: tempo, key, movement/momentum (tone, intensity), lyrics, and the context and meaning of genres themselves and in relation to each other. The DJ accomplishes this through practice—discovering many ways in which songs fit or don't fit, learning, feeling, committing to the process. They interlock songs and parts of songs at different stages and create the possibility of others to engage anew—to play with familiarity and strangeness.

Sasha Frere-Jones (2005) described the "new math" of the Mash-up as $1+1+1 = 1$. The result is not simply additive—it involves stripping pieces and parts off of tracks, laying them on and underneath and alongside other parts. But, as I have learned living in the borderlands, experiencing how language positions, excludes and liberates—how it can forge connections or signal hybridity—the vocabulary work of the Mash-up—the attention to tempo, key, genre, tone, and momentum—means that the integrity of a new experience can be compromised by a tenacious adherence to the original position, the original song.

Helfenbein: I admit that a call to disciplinarity troubled me at first. Gut-reactions related to discipline and disciplining combined with questions of a new canon and an over-arching puzzlement as to why we needed such work made me skeptical. There were, however, recent markers in my developing understanding of what we might do with these self-imposed and strategic directions. The first being a consistent reminder that they are indeed self-imposed and, in the same spirit of teaching the social construction of knowledge, as such we can self-impose; we can construct something *else*. The point here is Pinar's (2007); when he speaks to the need to cultivate an intellectually vibrant field he does so with the resonant question: "Upon what are… [we] drawing to speak to school-based colleagues" (Pinar, p. xvi)? This struck home for me as I have often said that we do curriculum work all the time as we work with our school-based and community partners in efforts of reform and professional development. In fact, I have argued that this work is most vital in its curriculum form and even that if we don't do curriculum work it will surely get *done* to us. But, Pinar pushes me to think about the role of a scholar in curriculum work by insisting that we interrogate what we draw upon as we do that work; that we engage in the critical work of placing our efforts within a historical field, denying the pitfalls of presentism. This I get.

Another way in which we do curriculum work is teaching. It has been recently noted (e.g., AAACS 2008) that many of the current generation of curriculum scholars in fact hold positions in teacher education as a result of the reduction of curriculum programs. This is the case with me and my curriculum courses that tend to be parts of minors or prerequisites in other graduate programs such as educational leadership, language education, or secondary education. So, the work for me begins with making a case that curriculum matters in an era of accountability and technical rationality. The way I do this is first through curriculum history, pointing to the power

of curricular ideas in historical contexts, shifts in the veracity of those ideas—"the Struggle" as Kliebard (2004) calls it—and their impact on the lived experience of schools. Then, when we have worked through a contested, complex contextualization, we make the move to theorizing. I have learned that this process, for me, is the most effective way to get at what is important in curriculum work: the feminist, the critical, the queer, the autobiographical, "the interdisciplinary study of educational experience" (Pinar, 2004, p. 2).

Keller: While my scholarship takes on an intellectual labor being informed by those who have come before me—delving, critiquing, reconceptualizing (Pinar, 2007, p. xii)—some of my teaching is restricted by students' expectations, and in turn, the need to receive favorable evaluations. This dilemma occurs for me when I teach a senior class in social foundations. The students typically come to class with expectations of a very student- , project-centered curriculum after spending three prior semesters in a teacher education program in which most of their concepts of pedagogy revolve around the "applied." My commitment to a reconstructionist, critical approach and the intellectual labor of my discipline(s) are not mutually exclusive. Yet, the resistance of students to get beyond the *applied* and mingle with our contemporaries and those who have come before us in an intellectual, dialectical dance causes me to reconsider the boundaries between my philosophical research and my service-learning research with respect to how both can inform my teaching. While my service-learning research examines how students' experiences with their service influences their attitudes on several levels regarding the social, economic, and political underpinnings of the lived experiences of those whom they serve, I frame the research in philosophical terms. This, however, is in contrast to what I term my philosophical research, in which I engage philosophical ideas in a conversation of sorts between themselves in relation to progressive and critical pedagogy. My service-learning research directly shapes my teaching, but it is more difficult for my philosophical research to find space in my classroom. This troubles me…

I see my dilemma as working at the intersection of my philosophical work, my service-learning research, and my teaching. The challenge is getting students to engage in these various forms. To what extent should I, the teacher, impose a sense of intellectual discipline in an ethos of student- and progressive-oriented curricula? I agree with Freire (2005) that the task is to provide authority without authoritarianism, but in a world where student evaluations matter, the boundaries between my philosophical work and my teaching are real and always open to transgression, and it's this transgression that gives me hope.

Magee: Five years ago, as a clinical assistant professor, I entered the world of science education. I had already begun to question the validity of my own experiences as a science student, but I was not ready to give up the importance of the canon of science that I had been required to know. As someone with a traditional chemistry education, the walls of the canon were old and fearsome. Challenging what was important to know and understand seemed heretical and something for which I was not qualified. Over time I came to see how disciplinarity (chemistry and education) would bring me to a less well-defined, but more productive place, both with respect to my teaching and my understanding of chemistry.

By the time I participated in the faculty reading group of Pinar's book I had developed a deeper understanding, a verticality perhaps, of the different ways that science could be taught and experienced. As I interrogated my own teaching, I saw that my methods were not productive for my students. When students would return to me in the teacher education program I had clear evidence that they had not learned what I was hoping they learned in the prerequisite science course. Prior to teaching elementary methods I taught a prerequisite science course for pre-

service elementary teachers called "Q200—Introduction to Scientific Inquiry." In this course the canon (Gabel, 1993) dictated "learning" the science process skills. The course content focused on learning how to make observations, inferences, defining experimental variables and so on, in specific order, with the assumption that one could *then* string these altogether and "do" scientific inquiry. I taught this science content course with passion and gusto. I broke things down into easily digestible bits for my students. I convinced them that science was fun and that they could do it. I now see this experience (although I no longer teach like that) as a necessary first step in the blurring/challenging of my im/possible boundaries between being a scientist and being a teacher. During this time I was challenging the idea of science being unattainable for many and challenging the idea of science being something that required much rote memorization. But what I was not challenging was the age-old idea that science needed to be put forth by an expert in such a way that a novice could do and understand the work. Although to many of my science colleagues this seems impossible, it is what I do now.

Wood: The problem with imposing any one discipline on my current work is that it forces me into the realm of the deadly curriculum worker, a place I do not want to be. These boundaries of a discipline show me the "shoulds" and the "oughts" of a way of thinking, a way of doing, a way of working. They reflect a particular range of scholars and scholarship that one surely reads in graduate school. These boundaries point in the direction toward which one must be published or have presented in time for tenure review. The boundaries reveal possibilities only half-realized and half-fulfilled. The boundaries can often prevent the development of curriculum from a rough and immediate stance, and probably uphold too much of the holy curriculum work.

What are these boundaries? I have a joint appointment, a three-way arrangement, between two schools and a community institution. My graduate degrees are in education, my field is museums, my discipline is informal learning, and my department is up for debate. In our School of Education we don't really have departments. I don't know why this is, and most of the time it doesn't matter anyway. As I look at what my colleagues do, and what I do, the boundaries of departmental affiliation are meaningless. It doesn't matter that I am working with a science educator or an education policy specialist to do my work. It doesn't matter because the work does not require that our disciplines be in alignment, but that our orientation and our ethos—the ethos of curriculum work—is in alignment. What matters is the respect for disciplinary training and technique that is informing the process rather than dictating it. It is this blending of ideas and experiences that makes the work interesting and challenging.

At times though the artificial boundaries set by higher education practices rear their ugly heads and throw us into an uproar. They create the deadly curriculum worker who dwells too long in one area or another without opening up and looking for the promises that come with thinking just outside the boundary. However, at the core of the disciplinary boundaries is the safety of identity and of collective purpose and practice. Surely this is the value of disciplinarity—I can find others who share a common background with informed scholarship that tell me of the mores, the values, the relevance of our work, the knowledge that is most valued…Here is where I fall short. When I'm in the safe boundaries of disciplines I hear too much of the outside world calling; I know too much about what I am missing. In the field, in my role as immediate curriculum worker in the museum setting, the disdain for theory can be painful.

In a position like mine, the problem of disciplines is that the relationship between boundary and identity become confused and I don't necessarily know who I am or to whom I am beholden in the sorority of academia. What keeps me upright is knowing that my ethos—my curriculum worker ethos—is where my obligations take me. As Appiah says,

The interests that entrain the "ethical self" are those of specific, encumbered human be-ings who are members of particular communities…An identity is always articulated through concepts (and practices) made available to you by religion, society, school, and state, mediated by family peers, friends. (2005, p. 231)

My discipline is defined not by a content area, but instead by the shared characteristics and culture of others—others who live outside of the boundaries and struggle to make sense of context and relationship and seek out interactions where multiple views come together, merge, diverge, and intersect. What we are to do, then, is to forget about the boundaries for awhile. We can dismiss the need to align with this field or that and settle in to the more important work—how to constitute the world, to build a union with all those who seek the edges and the in-betweens, and to work there, to dwell there: To make the work holy, rough, and immediate.

What Im/Possibilities Are Implied in This Ethos of Curriculum Work?

As we shape and reshape our definitions of self, of discipline, and of curriculum work, we arrive at the most challenging question of all. What actions do we take to move this ethos toward meaningful practice? The answers may be, already, implicit in the conceptions of fluidity of interactions and work—with whom and for whom we do this work; contextual considerations—where we work matters. We value the negotiation of ideas, the mixing and converging of orienta-tions, and we seek different ways of knowing and ways of doing. At best we implicitly demon-strate the tentative nature of curriculum work.

Scribner: I am currently working on a project with colleagues where we bring different disciplinary perspectives from within education, different experiences in and around schools and different research questions in the context of a partnership in an urban high school. I am learning the importance of attending to the tempo, tone and key of my own and my colleagues' approach to the project—of our methodological perspectives and our assumptions about schooling and scholarship. The horizontality we try to impose on the project activities stalls until we find ways to draw from the verticality of our respective perspectives and make generative connections that open spaces for a new research experience. I liken this work to a mash-up in process—and I am still learning. The "new song" eludes me for the moment. I remain preoccupied with how school-university partnerships and its related research can *matter*, and I am constantly reminded that there may be a program, a technology and a song or two or three—but without the *vocabulary*, the expressed verticality, partners go through the motions and threaten to do harm. Yet, in these complicated contexts, I am drawn to the spaces we create, where we live the *real work* of doing curriculum work: cultivating, maintaining, challenging, and revering the relationships that spirit its ethos.

Keller: I think that it is important to consider the significance of the limits of disciplinarity as we move forward. This includes engaging students in the *intellectual labor* (Pinar, 2007) of our respective fields while taking on the interdisciplinary perspectives that critical teaching often demands. The im/possibilities of the work we engage in, produced and grounded by and within the community of fellow workers, move us back and forth across the boundaries of our discipline and our disciplines as we seek together a committed engagement in the literature and the practice of curriculum work.

Magee: I am now aware of limits that I did not see before. Developing an ethos of curriculum forces me to acknowledge that I am not in control of what my students learn, and that by mandating that they learn specific and vast topics, I am fooling no one. If that is the case then we must ask—what is possible to learn and how do we know, as teachers, what to do? Is it possible for me as a chemist to understand what elementary school teachers need to know and understand in order to be effective teachers? If it is not about content alone what is it about?

Wood: Peter Brook ends *The Empty Space* with something of an invocation that can apply to the possibility of an ethos of curriculum work. Here, I humbly revise Brook's (1968) concept of "theatre" to "curriculum":

> In everyday life, "if" is a fiction, in *curriculum*, "if" is an experiment. In everyday life, "if" is an evasion, in the *curriculum* "if" is the truth. When we are persuaded to believe in this truth, then *curriculum* and life are one. (p. 140–141)

When we can be persuaded that an ethos of curriculum work unites possible worlds, and the work is focused embracing the uncertainty of multiple truths, then we have a possible impossibility.

Helfenbein: The ways in which I have defined curriculum point to its im/possibility—marking, of course, its fluidity, its contextual nature, the ways in which it moves in time and space. Ethos too, while calling for some kind of transcendent standard for acting in the world, remains insufficient. Thinking through curriculum as what Grumet calls "provisional ground…our mediating space" also requires an ethos in-the-making, im/possible to nail down, or to set in stone. But this is not to diminish the ethical project but, rather to point to its essential part in curriculum work.

Useful for me in doing this work is to think in terms of commitments. Borrowing from George Noblit (1999) and his reflection on ethnographic study, I name four core commitments to my curriculum work: the commitment to learning, the commitment to understanding, the commitment to people, the commitment to advocacy, and the commitment to work. I remind myself that I take up curriculum first to learn (to teach also yes, but I do that to learn too); the way in which I do my curriculum work is also rooted in a commitment to understanding, understanding in the communicative sense, in the sense at least in the beginning of more listening than talking; tied together are commitments to people and advocacy, driving the *why* of taking up a curriculum project. Finally is the explicit commitment to work itself, or rather, a commitment to work *through*. As you see thatthese commitments are all wrapped up together, but this last one is prominent in that in taking up the "complicated conversation" of curriculum committing to do the work, to do the working through, is the ethos. This means an attention to the ways the lived experience of schools is wrapped up in contexts, as my other work emphasizes, in places. As Pinar reminds us curriculum theorizing should have a horizontality in that power, culture, forces and systems all act upon curriculum spaces; it too has a verticality, or perhaps less-cumbersome a history both in coming to understandings of curriculum spaces and a history of working-through in the sense that others have tread before us—we do have a responsibility to acknowledge that work, to be "stewards of the field" but we should also think of ways in which these scholars might still go to work on issues of curriculum. These commitments require us to at least be open to that as possible; im/possible in the sense of any guarantee or easy answer but possible in the sense that we might learn and do something in the world—this is the ongoing

project, the curriculum project of what should and what might be. And here, I return where we started, Janet Miller:

> We must *work* our relationships to one another if we are to construct and reconstruct the curriculum field as an ongoing and human project, incapable of closure yet dedicated to taking action in order to create what "should be and what might be." (Emphasis in original, p. 213)

Concluding Thoughts

"...curriculum, that provisional ground that I am naming as our mediating space, the place where we can heal…" (Grumet, p. xvi)

Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is. ~TS Eliot, Burnt Norton

The "ethos" as we have defined it here is both a personal exploration and recognition of the work we do individually and collectively. This idea of curriculum work is an intellectual endeavor tempered by the concern for establishing and maintaining a space for communal growth, a solidarity perhaps. In this notion of solidarity we clearly fit Rorty's (1989) idea of "mutual protection," but is that really what this curriculum work is about? In the development of our mutual protection from the casualties of the disciplines, we have developed a much stronger sense of solidarity where we share in a sense of mutual commitment regardless of our affiliations, perhaps by virtue of our explicit *disciplinarity*. There is an expectation to find this curriculum work we do in the in-betweens and in that space there is a commitment and a call to action. We are united in action to create and sustain curriculum and pedagogies that invite difference, that promote intellectual discourse, and that honor our scholarly genealogies and heritages. This solidarity takes up what Henderson and Kesson (2009) describe as *diagonality*, the,

> development of dynamic personal understandings and broadening of "horizons" (Gadamer, 1975) generated at the vertical–horizontal interface, and the concomitant, "ethically committed" actions that arise as a product of the insights that emerge through this form of disciplinary study. (p. 134)

Through our efforts of mutual protection, we have gained the insights that nourish our pedagogical and scholarly efforts and have thus created an ethos of curriculum.

Our collective ethos is a gathering of ideas, of contexts and of disciplines. The means and ends of collective purpose are constantly changing, being defined and redefined from the possible to the impossible and back again. At the heart we are united by a commitment to intellectual discourse, to teaching, and to the provisional ground that is neither from nor towards. This ethos provides us with a common purpose in our curriculum work, though perhaps not one that is traditionally expected. Through the definitional work we build the discussion toward horizontal and vertical integration, create the mediating space of diagonality, and live within the im/possible ethos of curriculum.

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