

STANDARDIZATION, TECHNOLOGIZATION, COMMERCIALIZATION

How can “our attendance to the world,” Nicholas Ng-A-Fook asks, allow us to “shift away from disciplining bodies of knowledge through teachers and students marked as a standardized presence or absence?”¹ To reconceptualize such attending, he suggests we might “retrace ... its genealogies, reflectively and recursively, through its curricular roots (routes) to the etymological praxis of being present, presenting one’s self, while stretching our minds toward something like whose internationalization in times of globalization?”² Citing Antoinette Oberg, Ken Osborne, and Robin Barrow, reiterating their concern that Canadian curriculum theory has been insufficiently attentive to the particularities of this place – Canada – Ng-A-Fook notes that attention to nation and internationalization occur concomitantly.

Cynthia Chambers comes to mind,³ but so does Dwayne Donald, whom Ng-A-Fook characterizes “a cosmopolitan scholar with a long history of disrupting axiological voids and ... colonial frontier logics.”⁴ Ng-A-Fook sees a straight line – not thematic or methodological but place-inspired – from Barrow through Donald, Haig-Brown; Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, Nahachewsky and Johnston, Stanley and Young, adding: “But, still more work needs to be done in this and many other areas of educational research that remain at the margins.”⁵

In addition to specific scholars, Ng-A-Fook also attends to specific conferences, namely the Provoking Curriculum Studies Conference that took place for the first outside the western territories of Canada, at the University of Ottawa. (Presentations from which have inspired at least two book collections.⁶) He suggests such provocations provide “pedagogical opportunities for our reconstruction of subjectivities as curriculum scholars, teachers, and students,” not [as] self-enclosed or monolithic but (citing the scholarship of Hongyu Wang) “fluid, intertwined, multilayered, and networked,” enabling us to “move beyond the ‘global’ and ‘local,’ the particular as parochial, and universal as homogenous, as either static or abstracted entities, toward what might be richer cross-cultural, psychic and material relational engagements.”⁷ That challenge is complicated for Canadians by legacies of colonialism. “Not until being asked to decolonize narratives of my settler relationship to the land during my graduate studies,” he confides, “and more importantly to the original people who live on it, did I start to question how I narrated the ‘limit-situations’ of my ‘successful’ integration into the dominant settler culture and its respective capitalistic economy.”⁸

Working from within, in service to a “social action curriculum project,” Ng-A-Fook construes *métissage* an “aesthetic form of narrative” that provides “generative” opportunities for “students and Indigenous communities” to “work through” the

legacies of colonialism.”⁹ An example of such a curriculum project, he offers, is the Global Education Research Network, the aim of which is the exploration of “internationalizing teacher education as a cosmopolitan praxis, as a care-full global citizenship curriculum.”¹⁰ Such “cosmopolitan praxis involves deconstructing our autobiographical inhabitations and translations of the colonial narratives,” Ng-A-Fook cautions.¹¹ Such autobiographical labour – including, I should think, investigating the internalizations of colonialism – might enable us to “reread and live the intellectual history and present material realities of curriculum policies” to discern their complicity in “national creation stories that disinherit indigenous histories, knowledge and language.”¹² Recovering these histories, knowledge and language – institutionalizing them in the curriculum – provides a “potential passageway toward the future for us to recursively and reflectively ask more of our national narratives, of narrating alter/native visions of living a Canadian postcolonial curriculum.”¹³ .

“Reconceptualizing teacher education” and “curriculum theorizing as a cosmopolitan praxis,” is no narrow cognitive reframing; it “involves animating our curricular passions for global social justice, as educational researchers, teachers, and teacher candidates beyond its potential market value.”¹⁴ Mourning “the recent passing of Ted T. Aoki, Geoffrey Milburn, and Roger I. Simon” – whom he characterizes (after Rorty) as “strong poets” – Ng-A-Fook invokes the concept of the conference to “provoke the concept of strong poet in relation to the historical, present, and future contexts of Canadian curriculum studies.”¹⁵

“As we approach the 150th anniversary of our settler nation,” Ng-A-Fook points out (in a second essay), “the institutional headwinds that once supported the traditional aims of education have shifted to meet the demands of our current digital knowledge economy,” universities and schools now required to “implement different social innovation programs in the spirit of entrepreneurship for the 21st century.”¹⁶ It is a “story of progress,” he notes, wherein the “school curriculum must now be retrofitted for Smartphones, iPads, iPods, and digital literacies.”¹⁷ Teachers and students become “plugged-in to multinational socially mediated platforms like Facebook, with their powers of data mining, advertising, and commercializing our virtual realities.”¹⁸ Teachers, teacher education programs. and school boards are prodded to secure “edubusiness partnerships with multinational companies like Apple, Google, and Microsoft,” pressed to prepare the “next generation of technolaborers, experiment with social innovation, and establish cutting edge incubators within the elementary, high school, and university schooling systems that promise to nurture entrepreneurialism.”¹⁹ And – here Ng-A-Fook shifts from irony to parody – “only the right curriculum, right technology, right science, right clever politician, with the right business plan in hand, can enable us to cheer each other on.”²⁰ “In this story,” he laments, “the public school becomes a dystopian Deweyian Lab,”²¹ recalling the American philosopher’s famous school at the University of Chicago. Rather than encouraging social democratic development, the contemporary school is mandated to

“educate Canadian citizens toward a life of pioneering commercialized ideas for the elite.”²² Invoking Cold-War terminology, Ng-A-Fook parodies politicians’ concerns: “Our lack of technoeconomic preparedness within the school curriculum could be the defeat of our capacity to profit globally from settler capitalism.” To protect profiteering, the “curriculum” is recast “as coding, entrepreneurship, social innovation, and resourcefulness,” in a word: “technology,” what “everyone needs.”²³ Citing Aoki, Ng-A-Fook reminds us of the instrumentality rationality embedded in such thinking, positioning children not as persons permanently becoming, but as the raw material we must manufacture to produce profitable futures.

COMMENTARY

In the first essay, Ng-A-Fook alternates among theoretical, programmatic, and autobiographical references to compose a synoptic text, a curricular montage comprised of key concepts, among those concepts distinctive to curriculum studies in Canada, perhaps most prominently (to my mind) place and *métissage*. What is distinctive about Canada, however, can be eclipsed by tendencies toward standardization, technologization, and commercialization critiqued by Ng-A-Fook in the second pithy piece.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 2.

² Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 2. The sentence stretches from the phenomenological (being present) to the political (whose internationalization?), implying that genealogical labour incorporates both as an “etymological praxis.”

³ Chambers’ canonical essay calling for Canadian curriculum theory (1999; see research brief #34) was followed four years later by her landmark representation (2003) of the Canadian field in the first *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*.

⁴ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 3.

⁵ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 3.

⁶ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 4. Ng-A-Fook, Ibrahim and Reis 2015; Hasebe-Ludt and Leggo 2018. Conferences also played a pivotal role in the 1970s Reconceptualization of the U.S. field: see Pinar et al. 1995, chapter 4.

⁷ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 5.

⁸ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 7.

⁹ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 8.

¹⁰ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 9.

¹¹ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 10.

¹² Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 10.

¹³ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 10.

¹⁴ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 11.

¹⁵ Ng-A-Fook, 2013, 12

¹⁶ Ng-A-Fook 2016, 30.

¹⁷ Ng-A-Fook 2016, 30.

¹⁸ Ng-A-Fook 2016, 30.

¹⁹ Ng-A-Fook 2016, 30.

²⁰ Ng-A-Fook 2016, 31.

²¹ Ng-A-Fook 2016, 31.

²² Ng-A-Fook 2016, 31. With the use of “pioneering” Ng-A-Fook reintroduces colonialism, this time data colonialism. Couldry and Mejias (2019, 85) “argue that historical colonialism and data colonialism share some fundamental structures that ground the resource appropriations and social relations of each: the way the colonized subject is conceptualized and how colonialism shapes the way the colonized think of themselves; the naturalization of certain modes of ruling subjects; and the legitimation of certain types of knowledge with their associated claims to power, including a specific conceptualization of time and space that ends up universalizing a specific worldview.”

²³ Ng-A-Fook 2016, 32.