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Of Back Stories, Byways & Entangled Aesthetics of Epistemology: Teaching Art, Poetic Protest and Curricular Alterity in a Time of Ethicide

Abstract

Of Back Stories, Byways & Entangled Aesthetics of Epistemology: Teaching Art, Poetic Protest and Curricular Alterity in a Time of Ethicide engages autobiographical analysis to illumine and offer examples of what art and poetry may offer as forms of nonviolent resistance and protest for teachers and teacher educators in challenging curricular epistemicide and advancing educational ethics and justice.

Keywords

curriculum epistemicide, narrative inquiry, art as protest

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The white fathers told us, I think therefore I am; and the black mothers in each of us—the poet-whispers in our dreams, I feel therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary awareness and demand, the implementation of that freedom.... [A]s we become more in touch with our own ancient, black, non-european view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes.... sanctuaries and fortresses and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas.... For within structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. (Lorde, 2020, p. 5)

I believe that any great work of art is, in itself, a form of resistance against a sense of powerlessness. (Yorke, cited in Saler, 2019, p. 52)

In the largest sense, every work of art is protest... A lullaby is a propaganda song and any three-year-old knows it... A hymn is a controversial song—sing one in the wrong church: you'll find out. Pete Seeger (n.d.)

I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist.... Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit. (John Steinbeck, n.d.)

The words here with which I have begun have all come from artists of one variety or other, but in their work they are poets too—in the sense of which Lorde (2020) describes poetry as the distillation, illumination and revelation of experience, vital to our existence, helping give “name to the nameless” so that it may be thought (pp. 3, 4), inciting dreams, questions too, and moving us to action. In this—whether identified as poet, musician, literary author, social critic or activist—they are, I think, teachers too; and offer if only a glimpse here something about teaching, art/poetry and protest/resistance to ponder. The philosopher Hannah Arendt described the essence of education in *Between Past and Future* (1954/1993) as natality—new beings ever come into the world before whom we are responsible, ours to welcome, care for and teach, as well as listen to, learn from, and open to and nurture the newness they bring, and for the mutual renewal of the world we share. Of course, as we know it, much of this happens through what we call schooling via the curriculum, conceptualized as a knowledge project, irrevocably it seems, marked by the workings of power too, inequity, injustice, and even a certain violence. This new being, the child practically sings before speaking, dances upon standing, draws and paints before writing—art at the heart of human expression, and this at the center of education rooted in our relationality. The new changes things, us, is dangerous; so is the ancient, now foreign, that which is different, unfamiliar, too, in any appraisal. Best to stick to the scripted, then, the standardized. And of course, such is also the white father's—and yes, Western, European—epistemology. Art here then can be a form of nonviolent resistance, and so can teaching—as bell hooks (1994) put it, one can teach to transgress, as the practice of freedom. Too, curriculum as *poesis*¹ challenges standardization (Henderson and Kesson, 2004).

¹ The Greek origin of the word for poetry, it means in the most rudimentary sense art making, referencing the craft of making, composing, formation of something. For the Greeks, it signified the activity too through which one brings something into being which did not exist before, creative bringing forth and emergence of the new. Henderson and Kesson (2004) describe it as “soulful attunement to the creative process” (p. 42). In this sense, one can see how such defies standardization, as also a singular source of subjective expression.

I don't think this kind of protest is possible, though, unless each teacher, teacher educator, curriculum developer, principal or other educational leader or scholar (and students with them) acknowledges this condition of our present curriculum and its abiding historical legacies, interrogates them and oneself in relation to them and one's work—call it decolonizing the self and the curriculum and school context and community (if one can use that word here), as well as embraces the possibility of and pursues one's work as art, poetry, protest, resistance and in the name of challenging things like curriculum epistemicide and cultivating a curriculum of nonviolence and epistemological diversity²—perhaps even something that questions epistemology and its precedence too. All such must also be uniquely rooted in one's own life, context, culture, kin, heart, soul, body, mind, spirit, passion, purpose, journey, temporality, story—no one else's. In this, then, I must confess. I am white, and from the West, and an American. I am a teacher and teacher educator. I am a writer. I love poetry and art and I try my hand at them, and yet I don't know that I am comfortable laying claim exactly to the name of poet or artist, even as I aspire. I am a peacekeeper and -maker by nature to a fault, eschew conflict, and grew up around Louisiana politics with a history of some colorful rivalry if not full-on banana republic-ry which gave me a distaste for politics in general—I am not so bold as to call myself an activist either, though I am committed to finding ways to respond faithfully as I am able to injustice, oppression and inequity in the world.

I am also far more inclined to work at affirming alterity and otherness; different ways of knowing and being and doing and valuing; epistemological multiplicities, hybridities, intersectionalities and pluralities; and that which precedes, exceeds, lies beyond or outside knowledge—than to active protest, resistance or revolution. In this, though, as I proceed, such may be here through an act of refusal of sorts (though, as you will see, not wholly): rather than via the exact norms of scholarly style, I share here a mashup montage of narrative recounting, moments from my own story—albeit at times academically engaged—involving in some way subjects pertaining to art, poetry, protest, resistance, epistemicide, curriculum, and teaching. Long before normal schools, teachers colleges, and education departments in universities; long before alternate certification and accreditation programs; there were storytellers, artists, poets, bards, shamans, rabbis, sages, and such. Others listened, learned, and unlearned; as they shared of their light, the candles of others too were lit, as it has been said, lighting up the world. I believe in the illuminating strength of the arts to move us in unforeseen ways that matter, and in the mystery and magic of stories, that they too can speak powerfully, and without so much epistemic academic commentary required.³ Perhaps even mine.

I.

Born and raised in South Louisiana, I spent most of my life there. My mother was an artist, poet, and teacher, though there in those days, as a woman, and with six children, she could only mostly engage such informally, in the living through home design, gardening, party planning, volunteer work, community service and the like, for herself and others. Her Bible study lessons were poetry, her gifts works of art, and the family events she hosted grand and beautiful affairs inspiring curiosity, joy and celebration. Hers was a curriculum of wonder—whether to be found in eyeing a lizard skirt through green blades of grass to

² Some of these terms may be unfamiliar to the reader—please, be patient, trust yourself, and keep reading. For now, suffice it here to contemplate interrogating curriculum that in advancing one view of knowledge and in a totalizing way—excluding, denigrating, marginalizing or coopting others—actually effects the genocide of other ways of knowing.

³ This is not to say that such seductive power cannot be used deceptively, dangerously and darkly, of course, too—to which one must also be attuned and with discernment attend.

settle on a spot in the sun or the gentle descent of pink “pom-poms” floating to earth from their Mimosa tree mamas, ripe too for tickling a cheek or two. A bedtime story included, as well, delicious reveling in and savoring the love of language and light of imagination, and stories’ immeasurable mysteries. My father made too an art, among other things, of things like barbecuing, duck hunting, and especially storytelling—on the porch, from his pirogue, in his chair, over dinner, beer, wine, whiskey, while shelling crowder peas or making roux for gumbo the old-fashioned way, requiring hours of stirring. You ate and felt “tight as a tick” afterwards; that old man who asked for prayer was “poor as Job’s turkey”; “that dog won’t hunt” was how you described a weak idea; and “too much sugar for a nickel” referred to something that had put on airs or was just a little too much. And never mind trying to ask for directions anywhere; you’d get a history lesson involving every street corner and building along the way, the folks there and come before them, the narrative spun set more on back stories and byroads as central plot lines, getting along to your destination rather adjacent, secondary. Living was to be found there, really, as art, and perhaps diversion. I described it elsewhere a bit more lyrically in contemplating the “3R’s”⁴ of curriculum as in our roots, routes and relations:

Ordinary life there, it also affirmed this way: hot, humid, heavy aromatic air—the plenty and thick of it; and wet, fragrant, fertile soil, soul-sinking and -settling swampland, swallowing and swaddling clothes; flora and fauna as fecund and fragrant and furrowing, grand old live oaks with upraised and outstretched brooding branches and strong, broad- and deep-reaching roots, nests and cradles, cypress “knees”—knots tying threads to everywhere. Time slowed to a hot pot of simmering coffee brewing on the stovetop. (Quinn, 2011b, p. 1217)

I moved to New York, which was anything but slow. Yet it wasn’t just the speed there that had me most flummoxed initially. Folks cared most about your work, what you did for a living, and were starkly direct—the world there at first was just far too prosaic for me. Someone from back home had given me a sticker that I posted proudly on the bulletin board in my office: *Louisiana, Third World and Proud of It*. I wondered, though, many times, why I embraced the idea so much, and what it actually meant to me. I didn’t miss—forgive me—the frenzied religion of football, or the fundamentalist Christianity that might have found the historical Christ wanting, the conservatism, anti-intellectualism, or living legacies of repressive racialized and gendered histories either. There was a character, Savannah, a poet who had moved to New York City from the South with whom I identified in many ways. I had met up with her in a novel I had read, once upon a time, the *Prince of Tides* (Conroy, 1986), set in the low country of South Carolina (not too very far from where I would later eventually live for a piece, actually, as well). Something she said might speak to such here a bit. She described her home in the novel, her South, as “a fragrant prison” (p. 28), which also resonated with me—the prison part, as I have mentioned and described above some, true, but too, how I knew I missed much this fragrance—metaphor, mystery, meandering: meaning’s other, alterity, inverse, breathability, unknown, limit, unknowability, something, nothing, emptiness, fullness, saturation, unspeakability.... A kind of poetic grace, beauty, found herein too... earthy roots, heavenly relations, all imbuing.

Third World, as the South, has also often been affiliated with ignorance and backwardness, that which is simple and uncivilized, and marked by a lack of development and progress too. What is not always recognized is the role resistance plays herein—an attunement to the workings of power and cultural domination, marginalization, exclusion and erasure—to epistemological violence; the critique of

⁴ There is a play here on the traditional 3R’s of schooling: readin’, ‘ritin’ and ‘rithmetic, also influenced by Doll (1993) who found them allied with Tyler’s rationale (1949) and a modernist curriculum not meet for our age. He plays on such in casting curriculum via a postmodern frame in his 4R’s of richness, recursion, relations and rigor.

knowledge's totalizing, privileged embrace, and via reason, mind, thought, intelligence, all experience encompassed and coopted therein; as well as the affirmation of the unknown and unknowable; of another way, of other ways, of knowing, doing, seeing, being, in the world too (e.g., subjugated knowledge, counter-knowledge, indigenous epistemologies, epistemological alterity, epistemological diversity, tabooed epistemologies, cripistemologies,⁵ that which exceeds/precedes epistemology...culture, art, body, soul, Gaia, spirit). In a collection to which I was invited to contribute exploring the possibilities that might be found within epistemologies of ignorance,⁶ I sought to inquire into my own affinities for such further:

There is an 'ignorance' (at least, so-called) to which I have sought to hold fast, maintain and even cultivate, and not merely as that which is counter to dominant constructions of knowledge and their exclusivity (i.e., male, WASP, 'Northeastern' cultural capital of New York City where I now live, 'first' world) as academically framed, or in the way of the scholarly legitimate.⁷ I suppose such a stance could be postulated as the reclamation of the ground from which has been and continues to be generated my own "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) or the possession of a space for the constitution and possibility of my own "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1994), as it were, or even somewhat ironically⁸ as my own argument for the "transformative intellectual knowledge" to which Banks (2004) and Sleeter (2005), among others, are so vehemently committed, and also in the way of 'un-standardizing' and pluralizing curriculum and teaching via education as a knowledge project through critical encounter with historically-marginalized and -excluded epistemological artifacts and agencies.

Holding on to this kind of ignorance can also be viewed in terms of 'playing dumb'—a way of being and acting perhaps of note among historically oppressed groups dispossessed of power like African-Americans and women in the U.S., as a form of disaffiliation from dominant knowledge forms and the subjectivities generated by them; i.e., via normative discourses reinforcing, oft in unacknowledged ways, white, male, 'middle-plus' class, heterosexual or other privilege..... Yet, while this affirmation, in my case, reflects a Southern, feminine (perhaps classed and even raced, as well) penchant for the nonlinear, indirect, metaphorical, intuitive, earthy, bodily, sensual, inexplicable, irreverent ... mysterious, mystical and unknown; it means more beyond this as well. Primitive, perhaps—but thus also fundamental, this posture honors that which lies before knowledge and knowing, and that which lies beyond and even exceeds knowledge and knowing, somehow: a "moreness" (Huebner, 1999) that supercedes thought, language, conceptualization and conceptualizing. (Quinn, 2011b, pp. 37-38)

I've alluded here to a kind of art of living, aesthetically as well (as opposed to *anesthetically*), and attentiveness too to language albeit in a poetic way, as well as to perhaps the outside or backside or other

⁵ Cripistemologies, a term coined by Johnson and McRuer (2014), seek to acknowledge and affirm ways of knowing, being in the world, and the fruits thereof made possible via subjective experiences of or relationships to disability.

⁶ I refer the reader to my chapter and collection of which it is a part for further exploration of epistemologies of ignorance in education, and the complex and even contradictory contours of such—yet offering insight, I think, for assisting us in rethinking our pursuit and privileging of knowledge, and in relation to that which gets situated as beneath, outside or opposite thereof (Quinn, 2011a).

⁷ Some provocative examples of related work, and in the way of scholarly legitimation, include Snowber, 2004 and Whitlock, 2007.

⁸ Ironic is not quite the word here, but there are issues with my laying claim to these locations as a white person, having grown up in a culture so profoundly influenced by its Afro-Creole histories and cultural influences; and all such is quite complicated. Admittedly, I am focusing here on only some aspects for the purposes of this work here, which I problematized to a greater extent in the original piece.

side of things too—byways to thought, language, life or knowing maybe. Ways of being, of knowing, that don't quite line up with, measure up to, good-old-golden-school-rule-day ways. On a visit home in 2015, I ruminated—or tried to—poetically:

Emboldened, this embodied creole care courts
Not the unending march of progress—
The soft sciences of sensuality its sustaining
Underbelly understandings,
Rooted revelations.

Its knowledge, life, and way of being
rather in the tucked-away and
unexpected treasures and pleasures
To be found in a hidden flower-framed garden;

Counts the mysteries by moments,
In earth tones, and rhythm and blues,
As moss-covered memories from cocktails and conversation,
At dusk on the porch.... (Quinn, in press)

Upon moving back South, I thought through such matters again with a colleague through this related idea and experience of porch-swing lingering:

This way of being might have something to do with its “other,” indirect way of knowing, of alterity, rooted in a history of oppression, and the creative resistance and response of its subjugated peoples. Influenced by its black heritage, it may be that an African epistemology dwells more deeply here, which Watkins (1993) aptly described: moving in circles, not preoccupied with verification, but rather seeking interpretation, meaning, and expression. (Quinn and Christodoulou, 2019, p. 46)

Our very own roots, tied to histories of oppression, ways of knowing and being, and quests for interpretation and meaning—inextricably entangled with that of others—summon us to unique and particular forms of creative resistance and expression, that at once also constitute curriculum that may challenge epistemic violence and teach healing and nonviolence.

II.

It was 2017 and as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (AAACS), I was working with colleagues to prepare the call for proposals—the one that came to be cited in the focus of this journal's special issue—for our upcoming conference to be held in the Spring of 2018 in New York City (NYC)—ever my city, beloved city, though I no longer lived there. We had the practice in such work of trying not only to connect with what fellow curriculum organizations were already addressing—in addition to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) since our conference was held annually before it in the same city; but to also consider the geographic location of the meeting in crafting the call, and the contemporary context or historic moment writ large, as well as the work of our colleagues there.

AERA asked education scholars that year to speak to “The Dreams, Possibilities and Necessity of Public Education”, increasingly at risk, and the role of education in sustaining aspirations of democracy, freedom and equality of/for “we the people”, as well as the ongoing struggle for justice requisite therein (AERA 2018 Annual Meeting Theme, 2018). And its call began too with a poem: inciting the longings Langston Hughes in 1935 expressed so well, that America might be America ‘again.’ Acknowledging NYC (what some have suggested is the most American of cities, while others claim it is anything but), as well, as an apt locale for such inquiries—e.g., gateway for immigrants, refuge to the oppressed, diverse composite of democratic experiments and struggles—it encouraged also radical imagination and inspired action.⁹ Earlier in 2017, the Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference theme had emphasized educational empowerment, social change, and justice; and *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Bergamo* Conference sought to examine curriculum theorizing in “new times”, referencing complicated challenges, for example, involving the school-to-prison pipeline and resegregation as well as those for LGBTQI youth.

These “new times” addressed might be broadly described in relation to a global re-emergence of and rise in nationalism and authoritarianism—populism¹⁰ also linked up therein—with accompanying intolerance, divisiveness and conflict. Unsurprisingly, then, as well, these times called for and were ripe with protest (and counter-protest). In the United States particularly, in the wake of the election of Donald Trump as president, inaugurated in 2017, such polarizing differences, threats to freedom and demands of justice were made more visible, or visible anew—for example, respecting race, gender, immigration, and climate change. I remember all too well arriving to the campus of Augusta University where I then worked one day aghast to find it filled with White nationalist flyers advancing White pride and supremacy and associating brown and black bodies with an unwanted America. And we all remember the shootings and fires that targeted Black churches throughout the South, as well as the White power rally in Virginia. In NYC alone, there were 600 protests (including The Women’s March, #NoBanNoWall, LGBT Solidarity Rally, Muslim and Immigrant Coalition for Justice March, Trans Rights March, Black Lives Matter, People’s Climate March, March for Science, Rally to Save the Arts, and The People’s March for Educational Justice, to name a few) that year.¹¹

New York City has also historically been a centerstage for some of America’s largest protests and important cultural movements—and a center for the arts, which have had their significant part in all such as well (e.g., Negro Silent Protest Parade, 1917; Peace March, 1967; Stonewall Riots, 1969; Anti-Nuclear March, 1982; Occupy Wallstreet, 2011; People’s Climate March, 2014; March for our Lives, 2018; Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s; The Age of Jazz, the Hip Hop Movement, Abstract Expressionism; Broadway). Partnering with St. John’s University,¹² the AAACS 2018 Conference keynote was to be held there in the Great Hall at Cooper Union too which “has stood for more than a century as a bastion of free speech... To the Great Hall's lectern [have spoken] rebels and reformers, poets and presidents—[like Dylan Thomas, Carl Sandburg, Lee Friedlander, Margaret Mead, Thurgood Marshall, Gloria Steinem, and before or while in office, Lincoln, Roosevelt, Wilson, Clinton, and Obama]; ...[and as] the platform for workers', women’s—civil rights” (Great Hall History, n.d.). The

⁹ Such brings to mind Stovall’s stirring work (2018) on abolitionist pedagogy and cultivating a radical imaginary in education.

¹⁰ Such populism Peter Dolack (2022) calls a “phony populism” built on propaganda, not unrelated to the role social media has played in a post-truth era (Keyes, 2004).

¹¹ I have highlighted here protests addressing threats to civil rights and social justice via examples included here, though Giroux (2022) and others note as well the preponderance of counter-protests, and counter-revolutionary efforts affiliated with fascism and at odds with democracy.

¹² The hospitality and generosity of colleagues there, Daniel Ness and Steven Neier, are to be noted here, along with their labor in procuring for us this revered site.

theme adopted for our convening that year clearly emerged thus as: “From ‘Hood’ to ‘High Line’: Of Poetry, Protest and the People in Curriculum Studies.”

In many ways, the subject of our address in this special issue—Challenging Curriculum Epistemicide: Art, Poetry and Teacher Resistance—is something of the matter that this 2018 conference sought to take up, if even slightly differently framed, focused, and articulated. We asked anew a central epistemological (pertaining to knowledge and the study of knowledge, to foundations and theories of knowledge) question of the curriculum field—*What knowledge is of most worth?* (Spencer, 2015)—in light of the enduring violences of epistemicide¹³: the systematic, colonizing destruction by the imperial West of other (rival) forms of knowledge, rendered inferior, inarticulate, invisible, before the supposed supremacy of Western epistemology, affiliated with reason, science, and the power structures of modernity. (Santos, 2005; Bennett, 2014)—*Whose knowledge? For whom? By whom? For what?* We sought to bring the devalued, excluded other knowledges¹⁴ into focus; ‘hood’ to ‘high line’ speaking also to forms of displacement, re-designation, re-colonization, co-optation—the laying claim to, or taking possession of, all such as well by this dominant epistemology.

Concerning art and poetry more specifically herein, a bit more of this narrative may help. During this period, I was also working on an edited collection honoring my mentor—and internationally renowned curriculum scholar, who incidentally was always and ever enthusiastically engaged in “outside the box” teacher education, as it were, and as a teacher with his own students as well—William E. Doll, Jr.¹⁵ Utterly unique, even perhaps larger than life, there are no easy words to describe this man, nor the work with which he both eloquently and playfully bequeathed us. While colleagues would not likely principally (or normatively) ascribe words like *critical*, *protest*, *resistance*, *epistemicide*, or even maybe specifically *art* to him or his work, engaging with him and his scholarship anew through this collection inspired too, not only the substance but also the spirit of the theme we presented for this curriculum conference—about poetry, protest and their relation, and to alternative ways of seeing, being, speaking, doing, curriculum and teaching; ways that in and of themselves are too forms of resistance in that they affirm something different, other, new (opening to epistemological diversity and dialogue).

In fact, we began the call with a poem Carl Leggo (2019), who Doll once dubbed the ‘poet laureate of curriculum and pedagogy’, had crafted for the collection. He likened Doll himself to a poet, in terms of his continual embrace of the imaginative, emotional and spiritual aspects so essential to life, and to education worthy of the name,¹⁶ with which also our culture has so lost touch of and failed to value—what Apple, Greene¹⁷ and others have described elsewhere as the lack of poetic encounter, the flattening of the complex human condition, characterizing dominant educational work (e.g., quantifying ‘rubricification’ and reifying standardization) too; and also rooted in the West’s epistemological privileging

¹³ This concept was coined by Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, a sociologist who described it in relation to colonization and its genocidal effect on the knowledge of the subordinated.

¹⁴ It was Joao Paraskeva, then vice president of AAACS, who specifically introduced the concept of epistemicide into our call, curriculum epistemicide also the subject of one of his recent books (2016). Contributing herein too were our officers Denny Aletheiani and Seungho Moon, as well as conference chair Todd Price and conference host Daniel Ness.

¹⁵ Such a remarkable teacher and creative teacher educator, a book was also written about Doll’s pedagogy (See Wang, 2016.).

¹⁶ One recalls here the work of David Jardine who ever recalls us to education’s root in *educere*, the leading out or bringing forth of life (e.g., 1992).

¹⁷ Michael Apple is widely known for his critical analysis of curriculum as ideological, establishing, legitimating, and maintaining official knowledge, not unrelated to questions of epistemicide and resistance. The late Maxine Greene inspired generations of teachers with the call to wide-awakeness in their work, and the powerful role the imagination, aesthetics, and the arts can play in such; and she continues to do so through programs established in her name of the Lincoln Center in New York City, and the Maxine Green High School for Imaginative Inquiry there.

of reason and objectivity, and devaluation of the subjective, intuitive, relational, temporal, lived. Doll¹⁸, Leggo asserted, dared to holistically encourage all the energies that shape us, living “with the energy of the exclamation point” (p. 204). In suggesting something else to which we might lay claim, to reclaim, it is worth citing here, a few lines of Leggo’s poetry:

we need to claim more, declaim more
exclaim more, proclaim more
we need to reclaim

the bold voices of poetry

our poetry needs to startle

our poetry needs to howl

... *CLOSED* on the school window
who can learn when the school is closed

.... like a poem is never closed & controlled
curriculum is emergent & startling

we are not sentenced to linear expression
sitting meekly at desks in tight uniforms

curriculum attends to the spaces between
letters & words & lines where poetry grows

with spell-binding delight in wild possibilities
leaning into love with tantalizing hope for the other. (Leggo, 2019, pp. 205, 207, 208)

The least of which we wanted not to disavow here was that all too oft excluded other in education, curriculum, the academy—love, for the other, and hope for the other that tantalizingly and joyously attends it... love, too, source of courage and passion, as a force for justice (Kaur, 2021). Knowledge born of love. And so, we sought to remind/re-mind ourselves, call and inspire ourselves to such claiming, declaiming, exclaiming, wherein protest illumines the passion for and art of the possible, the otherwise, respecting our work in the world in curriculum studies—with, for and by the people too. The poetic, this ‘radical imagination’ to which AERA summoned us that year, was meant, too, to embrace art—all the arts—writ large, the many diversity of forms and expressions of knowing, and being and becoming;

¹⁸ Interestingly enough, much of Doll’s work entailed exploring curriculum in relation to the findings of the new sciences, moving it beyond Newtonian notions rooted in modernity to consider curricular implications of postmodern thought, and chaos and complexity theories, wherein science too is appreciated as an art. He was fond of drawing upon Milan Kundera in advancing curriculum as the art “born as the echo of God’s laughter”, “a fascinating imaginative realm”, “where no one owns the truth and everyone has the right to be understood” (Kundera, 1988, cited in Doll, 2012, p. 231). This was a science predicated on multiplicity, interconnectivity, relationality, emergence.

counter the hegemonic silencing of such; challenge epistemic superiority—via poetics and passions, spirit, heart, body, being, indigeneity; and affirm alternative, other, different, more, the free and full-bodied, startling and stretching the boundaries of how we conceive of, pursue and share our work, in an ongoing struggle too toward greater justice (e.g., social, cognitive, and epistemological; ontological—respecting being, axiological—concerning values, and existential; emotional, aesthetic and relational; etc.). I believe the intention of this issue’s address encompasses most similar affiliations.

And thus our keynote speaker there was Peter Taubman of Brooklyn College, City University of New York (CUNY), former high school English teacher, co-founder of the Bushwick School for Social Justice, in Brooklyn, New York, advocate of the arts, and highly involved in the public work to “reclaim the conversation on education” as well—his award winning book, *Teaching by Numbers: Deconstructing the Discourse of Standards and Accountability in Education* (2009), also a keen analysis of the disheartening transformation of teaching and teacher education that has taken place in an era of neoliberal corporatized reforms. Herein so much knowledge too is literally disavowed.¹⁹ Limarys Caraballo of Queens College, and consortium faculty in Urban Education at the CUNY Graduate Center, a former English teacher as well, was also a featured speaker. Co-director of *Cyphers for Justice*, an intergenerational program that supports art, research, and activism with youth and preservice educators, she illumined paths for better preparing teachers to teach in diverse sociocultural contexts, and minoritized youth in particular, based on findings from youth participatory action research in which she was engaged.

Youth performers of Epic NEXT from Epic Theater Ensemble—an organization built on the conviction that theater as an art form has the capacity to promote social change in that it fosters empathy, collaboration, and engagement with multiple points of view—inspired us too with their then latest production, *Building Blocks: Colorful Minds*, a commentary on the ways in which STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) is taught in public schools and the impact of such on STEM diversity in the workforce. A theater piece created through this ensemble’s summer youth leadership and development program, Epic NEXT had formerly created and performed work addressing educational segregation and equity writ large as well.

I trust it goes without saying that such challenges to address are with us now as well. One could also, then, readily claim that we are in these “new times” referenced earlier still, however old they may already seem: partisanships and pandemics, their effects, and the protests endemic therein—and new perspectives also called for in terms of response; pandemics here referencing more than Covid-19, but via Ladson-Billings’ (2021) depiction, also racism, economics and ecological distress. And the coronavirus pandemic has rendered all such even more visible, and visceral. Henry Giroux (2022) articulated ours most poignantly as an “age of counter-revolution” wherein the “politics of ethicide” reigns. It is not difficult either to see too that ethicide and epistemicide are allied. A term coined by Berger (2007),

¹⁹ Such involves not only standardization, high stakes testing, accountability and surveillance in an audit culture rather spuriously and punitively run on numbers; but also epistemologically created by coalitions of government, business and the learning sciences. Taubman also focuses on discourse herein and its force in shaping what education, teaching, learning, has become. In the language I use here, I reference another work of his too on other disavowed knowledge (2012) as well. Huebner (1999) before him noted also that the language we use to conceptualize and talk about education, teaching, learning, students, etc., is sadly radically reductive and stripped of wonder; only the metaphors we have chosen, of course, but directing our resources, curriculum, practices, relationships, assessments, and all, nonetheless. What if the student was artist, curriculum was poetry, teacher was activist, advancing much and many; what if, rather, protest, poetry, art, resistance, curricular multiplicity, and epistemic alterity were the languages we spoke, assessments we made, curriculum we designed, and pedagogies we played?

ethicide enables the normalization of violence politically—and the degradation of social imagination and civility, cruelty as culturally commonplace, fostered by cultural agents who “kill ethics” and thus also a sense of history and justice: ethical distinctions lost, “language emptied of its ethical referents”, injustices of the past denied, democratic laws and institutions challenged. Giroux (2022) continues:

At work here is a collective disavowal of social responsibility and the removal of political, discursive, and economic actions from any sense of the social costs involved... wedded to a politics of dehumanization, social abandonment and terminal exclusion, which accelerate the death of the unwanted.

Articulating the relationship here of such to neoliberalism, to fascism, and to education (with for example, Pinar, 2012, who likened developments in US education to those in Germany at the time of the Weimar Republic), he demonstrates, as well, its educational function and import. In these times, then, too, we may say that there is an assault on education, on knowledge itself—an epistemological war²⁰ underway: waging a full-scale attack against ideas, truth, rationality, ethics, and justice. This is a site of contestation and struggle over minds, emotions, and modes of agency; it takes place in diverse cultural apparatuses that must be challenged, redefined, and appropriated as sites of resistance.

And for Giroux (2022), education is a critical site for such resistance and redefinition, where the young may be offered the conditions and tools for engaging in critical thought, reflective questioning, informed decision making, and ethical action in community—and teachers, of course, with and guiding them too. While he doesn’t highlight specifically the place of art, poetry, or the imagination, herein, he does assert that which our situation demands, and the new vision, which such (e.g., art, poetry, imagination) affords: “a new language, a different regime of desires, new forms of identification, and a struggle to create new modes of thinking, subjectivity, and agency.”

Nowhere can this demand perhaps be seen more readily than respecting education: as if it weren’t enough that American teachers have been asked to “graciously submit” (Pinar, 2012) to a routinized regulatory regime of surveillance, standardization, high stakes testing, accountability, audit culture and “teaching by numbers” (Taubman, 2009)²¹ in a context haunted by the specter of school shootings across the country also with some regularity; they were then asked to risk their lives and health (further) teaching in a pandemic that as of March of 2022 made for the loss of some million American lives alone—and/or, for many for a good time, work online from home while also managing the education of their own children there, and many of their own students who did not have adequate technological resources, capacities or supports at home to faithfully attend to their studies.²² There was and has been a sense that something radically new or other is called for in this context, and unprecedented imaginative thinking and creative innovation requisite to such; but also a renewed succumbing to the established order of things in worries over what educational ground students have lost and efforts focused on getting them caught up as expeditiously as possible, and this largely wholly in terms of academic achievement and advancement that is prescriptive and numerically determined.

The cry has been to get back to “normal” as if normal was ideal, not to mention healthy, educative, just, good, true, healing, nourishing or joyous—as if normal had no part in the problems we have created and now face, had not the artless epistemic face of violence to be found and to face therein.

²⁰ It is difficult to touch upon the complexities at play here as amid the epistemic dominance of the West and its violence, even much of that which it has sought to lay claim to and make claims based upon—like truth and justice—therein has been disavowed or has given way, is contested, under assault or become more façade than moral force.

²¹ Such does not speak to the inadequate salaries, supports and resources, among other issues, for so many either.

²² I have focused on the U.S. context, grounding my address in relation to education in the U.S.; yet there are parallels in other nations across the world, particularly as in response to a global pandemic affecting us all, albeit differentially given international power relations, dynamics and differences—not unrelated to the question of epistemicide under discussion.

And as Lorde (2020) might remind, what of our experiences and our feelings, and oh so much need for grace amid so much personal and collective loss and grieving, and the uncertainties we continue to meet? My protest here is not terribly poetic, but it could be and imminently more compelling if it were—to cite Reagan Mitchell (2021), also inspired by Lorde (2020), and Wozolek (2021) too: poetry “as modalities for the marginalized [not normed or back to normal], or rather the fugitive knowledge creators, to unapologetically develop in the face of gatekeepers assemblages of violence in service to the beautiful project around robust and prophetic equity dreaming” (Mitchell, 2021, p. 4, p.8).

Maybe all children at some point or other—maybe many times—are asked what they want to be when they grow up. Ladson-Billings (2009) titled a renowned work of hers *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, yet we scarcely conceptualize or speak of the work of teachers in relation to such—the keeping of dreams, much less prophetic equity dreaming. After the tragic massacre shooting deaths of so many children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, President Barack Obama in grieving with the nation and world, too, reminded us: “Among the fallen were also teachers—men and women who devoted their lives to helping our children fulfill their dreams.” There was a brief time during the pandemic when this vocation was acknowledged and honored too—John Krasinski who during the height of the crisis created the online sensation *SNG, Some Good News*, even suggested a petition to pay teachers 1.71 million dollars, per day. Would that daily we would remember teachers as dreamers, dream keepers, dream nurturers; poets, fugitive knowledge creators, protest artists in the face of gatekeepers; the part of teacher educators herein too—with its literature on gatekeeping also, it might address such in this way. Curriculum would be otherwise, other-wise, indeed.

I too was asked as a child about my dreams. I can’t remember how many times, or how I always responded, but I do know that from an early age, and recurring much, were these ideas: teacher, writer, artist, doctor. The first three may not at all surprise, especially given all that has unfolded here in the course of my narrative accounting, though the concluding one, in a sense, is of critical import too when it comes to questions of challenging curriculum epistemicide and the ways in which the arts—the aesthetic/poetic—might be especially vital to such in teaching: where there is such suffering, woundedness, grieving and loss; healing, too, along with protest and resistance, is required; and the arts can be profound forces for healing—the muses, sources of inspiration, insight, truth, wisdom, beauty. Expression, communication, connection, restoration, reconciliation, and renewal too. Engaged, embodied, embrace of the experience of the world, singular, subjective, saturated with heart as well as mind, emotion and thought. “The truth is in the feeling...” (cited in Hirschman, 1978, pp. 179)

I think of Greene’s notion that we must lend our life to the work—speaking of works of art specifically, yet also as apt summons for our own work as art—in order to achieve it (1980/2001, p. 10). The work of art is something to be realized or completed, requiring our thoughtful and imaginative engagement, subject to how we attend (to), participate in, it (p. 13). Her mentor, Arendt (1954/1983), addressing the project of education directly ties it to *amor mundi*, love of the world, enough of such to take responsibility, to shepherd the young in “the chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, ... to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world” (p. 196). I was drawn to curriculum theory in relation to such matters as well. Influenced by protests against the dominance of curriculum conceived wholly after the model of a science bent on instrumentalism, efficiency and objectivity (among other things) that all too often betrays the world, and the dreams of children; the field sought fresh insight and renewal, the unforeseen rather than foretold, through the humanities and the arts, particularly, as well as sciences and social sciences: epistemic multiplicities and diversities, new and other epistemological views. Curriculum theory as committed to the interdisciplinary study of educational experience (Pinar, 2012), of *education as experienced*, grounds itself in the recognition that: “It is through subjectivity that one experiences history and society, and through which

history and society speak” (p. 23); and this acknowledged curricular import of subjective engagement (self) respecting subject matter in social context speaks also to the significance of the aesthetic, poetic, arts, in the knowledge projects of education too—vehicles par excellence of subjective inquiry, expression and meaning; passion, protest, celebration as well.

The memories that carry the most enduring meaning for me throughout my journey as a student, teacher, teacher educator, and curriculum scholar—too numerous to here recount—are those wherein just such were embraced and engaged: an education in which I participated, of which I was a part, to which I even contributed, and an education that changed me as well. High school students in Brooklyn speak back to the image of themselves presented in the media via photo journals of their lives and spoken word poetry performed on the subway. Elementary students in Manhattan create peace heroes and peace dreams art works and share stories from these portraits about what peace means to them and reflect on what schools and teachers could do to help advance it. Female college students and their teachers on Long Island participate in V-Day Adelphi, Until the Violence Stops Campaign to raise awareness and money to prevent violence against women and children performing “The Vagina Monologues”—many noting thereafter the healing effect of such involvement, while several young men speak of new levels of awareness and understanding gleaned in attending.

Educators draw upon oral history accounts of desegregation in the Central Savannah River Area via readers theater by which students learn local history and resonate with the lived experiences of race there. *Hamilton*, the Broadway hit, featuring the life of one of America’s “founding fathers” illumining the past speaks powerfully as well to our American story today. A group of fourth graders in Augusta, Georgia, so inspired by it, argued for its inclusion in their history curriculum, parts revised for this younger audience who effectively made their case and reveled in learning and performing it, as well as exploring enduring themes and challenges shaping our country and national identity. *Black Violin*, the hip hop duo, rewrite the music curriculum, and challenge stereotypes about who plays classically and what is possible therein as violinists drawing upon their cultural heritage as well as the Western canon. Monique Verdin, of French Houma Indian heritage—indigenous activist, artist and educator—brings us entangled stories of cultural erasure, coastal erosion and climate change in Southeast Louisiana through her documentary film, *My Louisiana Love*, and art works involving overlays of historical maps,²³ lost markers and other changes over time.

Such experiences have fostered within me an enduring belief that for education to be truly transformative and genuinely educative, mind and heart—as well as body—must be awakened and engaged via a holistic pedagogy which seeks to understand and critique that which is, as well as creatively imagine and work to realize what might be. Rather than marginalize the arts in schools, then, perhaps we ought argue for their centrality—not only to counter so much that is deadening and deadly therein, but also to forward exploring together, with heightened sensitivity, alternative (a multiplicity of) visions and views, the aesthetic at the heart of the cultivation and expression of human healing, potential, and solidarity. Teachers—curricularly poised between past and future, keepers of dreams and called to the work of truth, of justice, of love (Huebner, 1999)—ought perhaps be those engaged in what Steinbeck called these greatest of the arts indeed.

And while these back stories I have shared and by ways I have asked you to here take with me, then, are not terribly poetic, I hope they have offered not only some senses and set forth some examples of—inspirations to—ways in which response to curriculum epistemicide is possible (and necessary), and

²³ Vonzell Agosto, Erin Dyke and others have undertaken most fascinating and inspiring curricular work in this area around art, mapping and countermapping.

poetry, art and teacher resistance²⁴ in relation to such; but also illuminated the most temporal, textured, tactical, contextual, contingent, embodied, enacted, and entangled practices constitutive of this lived/living labor (de Certeau, 1984). This work is ever and must ever be then without formula or formulation—which indeed calls for an ongoing art of *anesthetization*, awakening, arousing mind and heart to new wonder-filled ways of seeing and being and responding in the world. Kaur (2021) describes such as the call of our times—"revolutionary love", wherein we labor with joy to birth a new world, to recreate the world anew that is presently in transition. The reigning epistemology, like its institutions, built on maintaining the interests of some over and at the expense of others, asleep to the truth of our interdependence and connectedness, suffers from a failure of imagination, which is also the beginning of violence. Through art and poetry, we may not only protest and resist in powerful ways, but also wonder afresh, open to and affirm others, otherness, the new, which too is the beginning of love.

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²⁴ It is worth noting that much of the literature on teacher resistance speaks more to opposition of teachers to critical orientations, especially when exposed to them through teacher education, rather than that of which we have been here speaking. Having worked in a preservice program committed to social justice, equity and inclusion, which drew students most passionate about educational work in this vein, it was often disheartening to notice the domesticating effects even student teaching had on them. Concerted systemic efforts, at multiple levels of education, seem to be called for in cultivating sustainable environments for this kind of work to take place.

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