Implicated and called upon:  
Challenging an educated position of self, others, knowledge and knowing as things to acquire.

Kent den Heyer  
University of Alberta, Canada.

Introduction

In an insightful work, David Jefferess (2008) reviews commonly enacted interpretations of global citizenship. Using initiatives at his university as an exemplar (The University of British Columbia, Okanagan, Canada), Jefferess questions the production of global citizenship as an identity position “rationalized” through “benevolence and pity:”

The notion of aid, responsibility, and poverty alleviation retain the Other as an object of benevolence. The global citizen is somehow naturally endowed with the ability and inclination to “help” the Other. To be addressed as a global citizen is to be marked as benevolent (Jefferess, 2008, p. 28).

Jefferess argues that this global citizen exists “outside history” and, therefore, outside the possibility of ethical interaction:

As a problem of ethics and moral responsibility and action, at the individual or governmental level – i.e. charity or development aid – poverty is conceived of as natural or outside of history and material relations of power. To frame global poverty in such a way is to disregard both the colonial history which, I would contend, produced “their” poverty and “our” prosperity as well as to mask the way in which recognizing the “inter-relationships” of humans on this planet is not simply an ethical tenet but a material reality (Jefferess, 2008, p. 33).

Positioning a global citizen as such, there is little to learn from placing one’s material reality and social positioning in relation to those of others; there are only the lives of the Other to help fix.

Jefferess explores this production of a global citizen through the lens of Raymond Williams’ notion of “structure of feeling” defined as “[t]he social character – a valued system of behaviour and attitudes [as] both an ideal and a mode [A] configuration of interests and activities, and a particular valuation of them, producing a distinct organization, a ‘way of life’” (Williams, cited in Jefferess 2008, p. 34). More specifically to his point, Jefferess questions the “structuring of feeling” that simultaneously creates and appeals to a global citizen as one called upon to express their benevolence by helping others as if all involved lived “outside history.” The global citizen is not implicated in the material and historical processes that create inequality, s/he merely seeks to help. Examined through a curriculum studies lens, the appeal of this structure of feeling is understandable; and it needs itself to be made an object of school inquiry.

It is telling that Jefferess writes from the place of the university. The university, after all, exists in a broader educational context that includes public schools. And like universities, public schools are places that produce particular stances towards what is being learned.¹ A successfully educated self logically concludes (or, learns to see)

¹ I speak here more specifically from the position of a former secondary teacher.
that knowledge, knowing, and others (for what they may know) are things — such as experiences helping others — to acquire. Where this is the case, successful students are all too familiar with the positioning of global citizenship Jefferess’ seeks to challenge.

Following Jefferess, I explore in this work how this “structure of feelings” as relates to global citizenship — or any other delineation of group membership — constitutes a curricular challenge as much as a challenge that can be met by any particular subject or discipline. This curriculum challenge in question form might be posed as follows: in what ways can we organize curriculum that implicates us in what we are learning so as to enhance our capacities to live with and contribute to democratic complexity? Let me turn to address this question. To do so, I start at the scene of teacher education and the ways I believe that work there reproduces a particular relationship to the texts of our learning lives that exemplifies the “structure of feeling” Jefferess contests.

**Readerly and Writerly Texts**

Segall and Gaudelli (2007) write about their teaching of education students. They make a poignant reflection on their years of experience in teacher preparation classrooms:

> What most often took place was a ‘performance of learning’ rather than learning. Put otherwise, there was learning that did not get implicated and students who did not implicate themselves or their practicum environments in that learning” (Segall & Gaudelli, 2007, p. 79).

They offer an explanation to account for this situation: most students come to their courses habituated as consumers of theory and practice rather than generators of such. In other words, borrowing from Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1993), who in turn borrow from Barthes (1974), Segall and Gaudelli interpret that most of their students prefer to engage theory, readings, and their own learning — that is, curriculum — in a “readerly” rather than “writerly” manner.

In a “readerly” approach to text, meaning is assumed to reside in the text itself. Readers require practice and skill refinement to extract that meaning. In contrast, in a “writerly” approach to text readers are called upon to make meanings through the context of their lives. It is in the ‘con’ and ‘dis’ of junctures between the text and lived life that meaning and value in this view are created:

> Unlike the readerly text, the writerly text is less predictable. It does not attempt to control the reader; he or she must make his or her own connections between images, events and settings that are presented by the author. In this sense, the writerly text asks that the reader ‘write’ while reading (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993, p. 390).

Segall and Gaudelli write that feelings of estrangement and discomfort invoked in a writerly approach to text lead “to a deeper understanding of one’s self and living situation” (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993, cited in Segall & Gaudelli, 2007, p. 79). As they conclude, students have encountered their learning in a mostly readerly manner: “students arrive in our classes having acquired the skill to read a text without writing it. That is, avoiding implicating themselves and the world in the text and vice versa”

---

2 Other factors also of course impact the degree to which student teachers may “implicate” their practicum environments having to do with (among others conditions) unequal power relations between those established in teaching and the school and those seeking to start their careers.
(Segall & Gaudelli, 2007, p. 79). This lack of implication is widespread as a colleague involved with me in another study recently stated:

I try and have [education students] dig under why is it that they’re so confused and frustrated with the fact that I don’t just tell them what and how to do things. Why does that cause confusion for them, or irritation, or even anger? (Author, 2008)

One response to this question might be that our students have acquired expectations for context-independent methods and answers shaped by their lives as students of institutionalized learning. As a result, many have been successful, plan to be successful, and will be successful precisely because they have rarely, if ever, been asked to “implicate” themselves in what it is they are learning. In contrast to this institutionalized “structure of feeling,” we require another organization of curriculum; one that approximates a writerly encounter-as-inquiry into the knowledge already possessed; to learn from rather than merely about knowledge.

Curriculum as Thing/Curriculum as Encounter

A distinction between curriculum-as-thing (body of facts, skills, and attitudes to deliver to the student body) and curriculum-as-encounter (with the ways our shared sense making is itself a historical legacy that requires explicit study) reflects two differing interpretations of ‘curriculum’ in the curriculum studies and teacher education literature. As Tony Whitson (2008) explores, curriculum can be interpreted as a practical concern about how best to convey the formal program of studies. Here questions concern the content students should acquire, what techniques assist in this acquisition, and ways we might measure student acquisition. Whitson (2008) notes that “[t]his interpretation [of curriculum] focuses on success or failure in the production of intended understandings or cognitions. Hence, […] the tendency [is] to see education as a matter of production, rather than formation” (p. 132).

In contrast, for Whitson (2008) such an interpretation of curriculum – as a program of intended consequences – can neither be adequately enacted or studied without also embedding that program within “the larger curriculum of their [students and teachers] lives beyond the school” (p. 132). Less concerned with a formal document – or indeed the future where it is hoped such learning will find its value – curriculum interpreted as encounter is an inquiry into the knowledge already possessed.

Let me relate this distinction between curriculum as thing and encounter more specifically in terms of a subject I have experience teaching in high schools and about in teacher education programs: history and social studies. In the interest of space I present the distinctions in chart form:

---

3 Indeed, it may often be the case that school success in fact requires that one not implicate or care too deeply about the content one is meant to acquire. After all, to implicate or to care oneself into this situation creates unpredictable complications and results and thus potentially disrupts the scheduled time required to both acquire and demonstrate that acquisition through evaluation.
As thing, curriculum produces particular relationships that animate “structures of feeling” where students take up a distanced stance of removed acquisition. As one education student recently described his success as a high school student, “Look, I just wanted to know what I needed to know, I didn’t want to have to think about it.” (Author, 2008). In contrast, as encounter curriculum seeks to normalize a different relationship.

Of course, both ‘curriculum’ interpreted as thing and as encounter as the object and subject of educators’ efforts have value and we need not position one as necessarily excluding the other. While not mutually exclusive, they are supported by different logics having to do with knowledge and knowing; whether, for example, knowledge and knowing are themselves things which require comfort to acquire or relationships that require the discomfort of “writerly” engagements. The ways such questions are reflected in classrooms involve the influences of a host of people’s interpretations and expectations involved in education (i.e. parents, students, teachers, administrators, politicians and so on). The range of these beliefs can be interpreted through “paradigmatic” reading of curriculum.

### A Paradigmatic Interpretation of Curriculum

Kuhn’s (1962) notion of paradigms posits that disciplines tend to crystallize around an organizing problem, agreed upon methods to address the problem, and a means of measuring success in doing so. Within the milieu of curriculum work, Henderson and Kesson (2004) and Henderson and Gornik (2007) build from Kuhn and argue...
that “when professionals advance a paradigm, they are making two interrelated moves. They are framing and justifying the organizing problem of their field, and they are stating how this problem should be studied, and they hope, resolved” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007, p. 10). In their reading, three curriculum paradigms presently compete for dominance today in North American education: ‘standardized management’, ‘constructivist best practices’, and ‘curriculum wisdom’ (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Because they are likely unfamiliar to readers of this journal, let me very briefly convey what problems define each of these paradigms.

Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Paradigm</th>
<th>Organizing Problem</th>
<th>Problem Solving Cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Management</td>
<td>Student performances on standardized tests</td>
<td>Activities aligned to high stakes standardized tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(S.M)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Best Practice</td>
<td>Student performances of subject matter understanding</td>
<td>Activities that facilitate students’ subject matter meaning making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C.B.P)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Wisdom (C.W)</td>
<td>Student performances of subject matter understanding embedded in democratic Self and Social understanding: 3S understanding</td>
<td>Activities that facilitate students’ subject matter meaning making in a context of active democratic learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The organizing problem of the “standardized management paradigm” is how best to improve student performance on standardized evaluations. Operating in this paradigm, the central curricular and pedagogical questions revolve around improving students’ ability to receive and reproduce knowledge as produced by expert practitioners in each discipline. Using a quantitative methodology to measure the success of meeting the problem, those committed to a standardized management paradigm utilize methods such as memorization, drill, test preparation and other related types of activities believed to help students perform well on standardized tests. In this paradigm, information is interpreted to be the knowledge students require and success is measured by the degree of its acquisition.

Operating within the “constructivist best practices” paradigm, teachers focus learning activities around the problem of student achievement of subject matter understanding interpreted as disciplinary performances. Readers will be familiar with those operating out of this paradigm in the work of Mansilla and Gardner (2008) and Gardner (1999) promoting “disciplinary knowing” and the critical thinking challenges developed to aid students to improve their disciplinary habits of mind as relates, for example, to the study of history (Denos & Case, 2006). Using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies of measurement, student displays of subject content and ways of thinking (e.g., weighing evidence like a historian) commensurate with the disciplines indicate success in this paradigm. In this paradigm, knowledge emerges through increasing competence with disciplinary procedures and success is measured to the degree students perform disciplinary “ways of knowing.”

In contrast to the previous two, the paradigm of “curriculum wisdom” considers the problem of how best to support students’ acquisition of content (including information, knowledge, and ways of knowing) so as to enhance their capacities within democratic societies; what Henderson and Gornik (2007) refer to throughout their book as “3 s understanding.” 3 ‘s’ understanding consists of selves/students using subject matter to interpret their diverse and multiple relationships to their social. Educators “ask their students not only to demonstrate a deep understanding of the
subject matter but also to exhibit democratic self and social understanding” (Henderson & Gornik, 2007, p. 16). Utilizing multiple methodologies, those operating within this paradigm seek to encourage diverse types of student performances of 3s understandings that illustrate the acquisition of self and social democratic insight. How might teaching Feudalism look from different paradigms?

Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Paradigm</th>
<th>Classroom enactment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Management</td>
<td>Students memorize a chart depicting feudal hierarchy; answer questions about the economy of Feudalism and other social facts of the times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Best Practice</td>
<td>Using diaries, letters, paintings, and textbook, students depict life in Feudal Europe by writing letters to a person of interest; answer a quiz on Feudal hierarchy; a one page argument about various responsibilities that each social group owed another.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Wisdom</td>
<td>“Does a Feudal system exist today in Canada? In the world?” Or, “What characteristics of Feudal life, if any, do you see today?” Students cover all information as described in previous paradigms and address the question for summative evaluation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a standardized management paradigm, schools are likely to be places where teachers convey answers to deep questions students are never asked. In working out of a constructivist best practices paradigm, students might indeed be skilled in applying their “disciplinary minds” to a problem in the form of a question. Unless that problem is explicitly related to questions that implicate those present, such mindedness likely does little to enhance students’ ethical capacity or familiarity with the democratic complexity. In calling up such capacity, I argue that educators need to extend the curriculum wisdom orientation to organize curriculum as an encounter with the ways in which our sense-making constitutes a shared socio-historical set of events and requires redress in relation to pressing issues of social concern. In other words, while a curriculum wisdom paradigm improves on the curricular formulations of the other two, it falls short of its potential unless questions of ethical import are explicitly identified.

Throughlines Questions as Curriculum Wisdom: Engaging the Generosity of Questions

Educators have many ways to organize their units, courses, and programs. Amongst others, we organize such around themes (e.g., the changing meaning and enactment of freedom), issues (e.g., racism), narrative-chronologies (as in the chapter organizations of most textbooks), and episodes (e.g., the weighing of evidence to offer an educated opinion about what might have happened and why). But crucially we must ask, what are the questions that such organization helps students to better address? I refer to these questions as throughline questions.

Throughlines are questions the content of our courses help students address. In an earlier work (Author, 2005) I adopted throughlines from the idea of throughline themes identified by scholars working at Harvard’s Project Zero. That project was

---

4 Of course, to emphasize, this is not to say that a standardized management and constructivist best practices orientation to curriculum are without value. Indeed teachers likely enact both paradigmatic interpretations of such curriculum at different points in the school year. Rather, it is to emphasize the need to embed the values of these approaches in a more implicating practice.

organized around Constantin Stanislavski’s argument that everything in a theatrical play should connect to five or six themes. Likewise, scholars at Project Zero make a strong case for the benefits of teachers identifying major themes around which their courses revolve. Rather than themes, however, I suggest throughline questions serve a more open-ended and, thus, democratically-inviting enactment of education.

Extending my earlier work is crucial. For example, we must distinguish throughlines from “essential questions” as identified and developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). Wiggins & McTighe define an “essential question” as “a question that lies at the heart of a subject or a curriculum …and promotes inquiry and uncoverage of a subject” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 342). Rather than questions at the heart of a particular subject, throughlines are questions that explicitly invoke 3s understanding, invite ethical contemplation, and can be approached by any number of disciplines. In contrast, I interpret Project Zero and “backwards design” as working out a C.B.P paradigm that does not implicate us in the learning. Questions are subject specific and do not move into the realm of democratic complexity or our socio-historical sense making. Here are two examples of throughlines:

1. In what ways are thoughts and viruses alike?
   a) What viral strains make up your beliefs and interpretations about…?
   b) Where did you catch them?

2. In relation to hopes you have for yourself and your community, are some thought-viruses better than others to have?
   a) What are those hopes?
   b) In what ways are they supported by social knowledge-belief viruses you have contracted? (Please see appendix A for some examples of throughlines as might be taken up in social studies grade 10 and in a teacher education methods course).

Rather than questions at the heart of a subject, we can approach throughlines from multi-disciplinary perspectives or frames of analysis. Let me provide another example:

To what extent should contemporary society respond to the legacies of historical globalization? (from a new Alberta social studies curriculum organized around questions).

To address this big, but rather unanswerable question, individual teachers can refine the questions to make them more specific and to reflect local concerns:

1. What factors most impact people’s capacities to practice freedom?
   a) In what ways does freedom from differ from freedom to?
   b) who has, and in what ways, the power to define who you think you are?
2. What similarities/differences exist between colonial exploitation in the past and present globalization?
   a) what is colonialism?
   b) what definitions exist for globalization?
   c) what is change and does it differ if we look at society, politics, or economics?
To answer these questions requires information – as with the a) and b) above – (as emphasized in a S.M paradigm) and a refinement of thinking so as to arrive at a reasoned judgment (as emphasized in a C.B.P approach). Yet, these aspects of human cognition are brought to bear on the present and call upon 3 ‘s’ understanding by using subject matter to interpret relationships between one’s selves and the social.

In my teaching, I present throughlines at the beginning of a unit or course. In my experience, they are often further clarified or replaced as my students and I discover more meaningful questions to which course content speaks. I summarize daily lessons and check student understanding by pointing to the questions I have up on the wall, “So, what throughline questions can we think more about with what we did today?” For example, students in my education course are asked to think through content about the following question:

In what ways can we as teachers have students investigate subject matter so as to inform their ability to distinguish between present situations and possible, probable, and preferable personal-social futures?

With the questions the content helps address clarified, evaluation becomes more flexible. For one evaluation I might assign a throughline question as an essay, another for presentation, or leave it more open for students to decide. For example, students have produced startling art pieces accompanied with an artist’s statement to explore a throughline question. Sometimes, I choose the questions students address and sometimes students pick. Each student can choose depending on interest and the connections they make between the content and a throughline question. Since throughline questions are multifaceted, in that they contain sub questions of definitions, they lend themselves to modification as required by the needs of students with learning challenges.

Throughlines not only provide a means to organize our work in conjunction with a curriculum wisdom paradigm; they also have several other instructional and assessment benefits:

a) rather than peek-a-boo forms of evaluation where students are left to guess what might be tested, throughlines serve as more honest summative evaluations in that they are presented to students at the beginning rather than the end of a unit of study;
b) these questions initially developed by teachers serve as exemplars of big powerful provocative and democratically vitalizing questions of import open to re-articulation by students and;
c) they direct student attention not only to deep questions of a discipline, but invite their attention to the ways various disciplines might inform reasoned judgments about pressing social issues.

To guide my articulation of throughline strands, I ask a set of questions:

Does the question or task require judgment? (i.e., cannot be answered with a yes or no and requires the consideration of a host of alternative perspectives)
Does the question invoke and provoke 3s understanding- Students/selves using subject matter to interpret their (present and preferable) relationships to the social?
Is it broad and big enough to call forth inspiration, yet specific enough to answer?
Summation

Using Williams’ notion of a “structure of feeling,” Jefferess (2008) questions his Canadian university’s enactment of global citizenship as a subject-position “outside history.” As he argues, those who occupy that address are rarely called upon to investigate their positionality as a function of historical and contemporary inequalities. I believe that this reflects a more generalizable condition of schooling in which teachers most often position students to take up a readerly relationship to the texts of curriculum and indeed to their own learning. In such situations, curriculum is envisioned as a thing – a set of knowledges, dispositions, skills, or ways of knowing – to be conveyed and acquired and in which we remain un-implicated. In contrast, using a paradigmatic interpretation of curriculum, we might address these shortcomings by interpreting and arranging curriculum as an encounter with the ways in which we know and what we know do not belong to us alone. In this sense, the challenges students, society, and teachers face are curricular challenges as much as specific disciplinary concerns.

Working out of a curriculum wisdom paradigm, teachers seek to enhance their students’ understanding that emerges from interpreting subject content and “disciplinary knowing” so as to explicitly question the diverse and multiple relationships of selves and the social (Henderson & Gornik, 2007). Throughline questions constitute one means to enact curriculum as encounter as reflected in a “curriculum wisdom” paradigmatic interpretation. The goal here is to assist students to become steeped in ethical contemplation and to participate more knowingly in questions of social life with an interpretation of the ways we all are implicated in the material conditions that shape what and how we claim to know.

References


Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices 3:1 2009


**Appendix A**

Examples of Throughline Questions

In what ways are our understandings shaped by exclusions of different types (symbolic, economic, class, etc.)?

In what ways are you defined by difference?
How do we count difference? Is difference counted differently across cultures?

In what ways is difference distinct from diversity?

a) What is diversity?  
b) What is difference?  
c) What are the sources of prejudice?  
d) What is the relationship between prejudice and genocide?

What social, cultural, or ethnic factors impact people’s capacities to practice freedom? To what extent do the definitions and labels society has for you differ from your own notion of who you are?
In what ways is inequality necessary to capitalist economies?
In what ways do we need and might we reconcile capitalism and democracy?

How do teachers cultivate individual expression and cultural diversity in a “system of learning”?

a) What tensions exist in this dynamic?  
b) In what ways would you know students were individually expressing?  
c) What is diversity?  
d) In what ways can you support such diversity in your teaching?

What philosophical and sociological assumptions do we make about what motivates people to act (or, not) in historical examples of social change? What constitutes social change?

In what ways can teachers reconcile the time required to ask worthwhile questions with the demands of content coverage, state mandated testing/evaluation, and state standards?
What tensions exist in contemporary schooling that affects your practice in these areas?
In what ways do you plan to negotiate these tensions?