abilities and skills, so as to advance and embrace a pedagogy that supports collective action across differences and through strategic alliances. In these complex and uncertain political times, we must be ever more cognizant of the fact that our nation’s schools remain a significant site for democratic action. Therefore, the preparation of educational leaders becomes central to the development of a critical citizenry, and is enormously important for the viability of our democracy (Dentith & Brady, 2005).

References


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Regarding Race:
The Necessary Browning of Our Curriculum and Pedagogy Public Project

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The recently unveiled website of the Curriculum and Pedagogy Group features prominently the images of four brown-skinned people on its heading. One of them appears with the palms of his hands in the middle of beating two conga drums; another sits back, lounging comfortably in
conversation; a woman smiles, holding what looks like a coffee mug; and a fourth poses for a photo with three lighter-skinned colleagues. These images might give the impression to a new visitor that the Curriculum and Pedagogy conference has accomplished what few curriculum theory organizations have: attracting a “critical mass” of curriculum workers from communities of color into its fold. A click away, early twentieth century black education scholar Horace Mann Bond is listed among the likes of John Dewey, Maxine Greene, and Alice Miel as one of the “generous, visionary minds” who has inspired the spirit of public engagement that the conference has embraced.

Yet, despite the portrayal of a racially inclusive space, the Curriculum and Pedagogy conference remains overwhelmingly a “white” space. By this I mean not only that brown faces are rare at the conference, but also that the work presented at the conference reflects intellectual traditions that appear to be grounded in the work of white scholars. In fact, with the significant exception of Paulo Freire, scholars of color are rarely mentioned as part of the intellectual genealogy that spurred our traditions of curriculum work. W.E.B. DuBois, for instance, is rarely mentioned in conference papers, even though he had much to say about curriculum, and he was deeply involved in highly public debates about the education of African Americans, often assuming controversial positions with great vehemence.

When I read the scholarship produced in curriculum studies, I can’t help but notice how “white” it sounds. This may sound reductive, but a reflection on the works cited on most published articles would confirm the appearance. Indeed, while there is an implicit expectation that we should all know the authors of the reconceptualization (most of whom are white), there is no expectation in our emerging community that we all know, for instance, what is “double-consciousness” (DuBois, 1961), or what was the social context behind Paulo Freire’s (1970) work. Ironically, both DuBois and Freire embodied the kind of public intellectualism that we often advocate as part of our curriculum work. DuBois, for instance, was an active public speaker, a prolific newspaper writer, and had the kind of public profile among both academics and the general audience that few in our intellectual communities can claim.

The invisibility of black scholars in the history of curriculum theory has been critiqued and documented by scholars like William Watkins (1995) and discussed in recent works like Turning Points in Curriculum (Marshall, Sears, Schubert, Allen, & Roberts, 2006). Yet, with few exceptions, it seems that only curriculum workers of color are interested
in integrating the work of scholars of color and others emerging from marginalized communities. This is not so much a matter of being inclusive (which can become tokenism), as it is a matter of being thorough by incorporating the work of scholars of color who have expanded various intellectual traditions in productive ways. For instance, to speak about feminism without addressing the challenges that Third World feminists have leveled to expand the political significance of this tradition would be considered poor scholarly work (Mohanty, 1991, 2003).

One of the biggest challenges that our Curriculum and Pedagogy movement faces in promoting a democratic community and public intellectualism is in being able to reach curriculum workers who identify and are committed to the particular struggles of communities of color. This is in large part an issue of language. During the recent “Articulating the Present (Next) Moment in Curriculum Studies: The Post-Reconceptualization Generation(s)” conference at Purdue University, for instance, two terms that are often unquestioned parts of our dialogue were challenged as being implicitly exclusive: “interrogation” and “American.” Professor Geneva Gay noted during one of the open forums that the term “interrogation” raised images of police abuse and harassment by authorities against the black community. Professor Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto noted how the careless use of the term “American” in reference to cultural practices that are unique to very specific groups in the US ignores the fact that America is a continent, from Patagonia to the Canadian (melting) ice caps.

In my experience, something as simple as the pronunciation of names can determine whether someone feels included or excluded from a conversation. My full name is Rubén (stress on the last syllable) Antonio Gaztambide-Fernández. Most of my colleagues have a difficult time pronouncing, not to mention spelling, my name. While most people are initially responsive when I joke about enjoying corned beef but not being a sandwich, and are able to say my name correctly, very often they slip back to the Reuben (stress in the first syllable) pronunciation. Eventually I get tired of reminding them, my shoulders stop cringing, and I pleasantly respond to the memories of sauerkraut, reluctantly accepting a new name. Indeed, as a Puerto Rican academic, I often experience a sense of split personality, as I feel I have to be less a person of color in order to “speak” to the Curriculum and Pedagogy community.

The above mentioned conference was an exciting event for me, not least because the organizers managed to bring together an impressively diverse group of papers. The usual breadth of approaches to curriculum
work that make our field so exciting was in full display in the ten papers that were presented and in the various responses that they yielded. Yet, even more unusual and impressive was the fact that four of the ten keynote addresses were written by people of color and five in some way incorporated scholarship seldom addressed in our intellectual discourse. In addition, the possibility of sustained dialogue around issues like the ones mentioned above was not only opened, but embraced. This was an exciting conference not just because of the intellectual life that the field exhibited but also because of the willingness of participants to engage in dialogue that was at times uncomfortable, and the ability to let the discomfort of disagreements is a generative place rather than something to be resolved.

And yet, even in this space, an unsurprising dynamic was evident. Brown-skinned participants (including faculty as well as doctoral students) were sitting toward the back of the room while the large mass of participants sitting toward the front looked more like the typical crowds attending curriculum conferences; lighter-skinned, fair-haired, blue-eyed. While some of the dialogues that ensued were rich and exciting, the arrangement of the physical space betrayed a sense of division along racial lines.

Building an intellectual space that might yield political strength needs to start from a sense of solidarity that takes as its core not similarity but difference. This is the core of how feminists have attempted to confront difference in their work. At the conference, Janet Miller spoke about working in “communities of dissensus” and about the idea that rather than working toward agreement and resolution, we need to learn to strengthen ourselves and our relations with fellow curriculum workers through the discomforts of confronting our own fears and insecurities when it comes to dealing with difference.

For example, besides a careful consideration of language, it would be important for “white” folks to think about how they are themselves “of color” (i.e., they, too, have a “place” in a racial order), and how this racialization shapes the ways they go about their work. While those of us who do not identify (and are not identified) as white can simply not avoid a direct engagement with processes of racialization whenever we “speak,” our “white” colleagues rarely have to consider what it means to be white and how they are implicated in the racialization of the field. This way of engaging requires that we make personal commitments to creative ways of being in solidarity with one another toward the personal, political, and intellectual “browning” of our field.
In this short essay, I have glossed over significant concepts and distinctions. I have embraced such reductions in the hope that this essay will spawn further dialogue and foment a “community of dissensus” that will strengthen our commitment to a publicly engaged curriculum work.

Notes

1. See the website at [www.curriculumandpedagogy.org](http://www.curriculumandpedagogy.org)
2. The phrase “people of color” is problematic, as it suggests that some people have “color” (i.e., race) while others don’t. Nonetheless, I use the phrase interchangeably with “brown-skinned,” in part, in the interest of simplicity, as well as to stress the fact that skin color remains a powerful marker of otherness. When I say communities of color, I mean communities of people who are perceived to have darker skin (even when they don’t) and thus are racialized as non-white.
4. Pinar (2001), for instance, has brought forward the work of Ida B. Wells in important ways.
5. The “interrogation” of Rodney King is perhaps the most famous example.

References

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What Does it Mean to be a Public Intellectual?
The Story of an Educational “Creep”

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This is both a difficult but also a crucially important time for those of us who are engaged in the struggles to take seriously—and not simply rhetorically as too many people do—the role of “public intellectual.” Perhaps a story will help illuminate this. I began working on the new edition of Educating the “Right” Way (Apple, 2006), the book from which this story comes, soon after my return from giving an address at an international conference in Cuba. As many of you will know, it is not easy for US citizens to go to Cuba. Special licenses are required. Permission is only given if the person has a “legitimate” purpose for going. And in the case of academic lectures at conferences, permission is only given if the conference is not sponsored by the Cuban government.

During the time I was in Havana, the US tightened these regulations to make it even harder for Cuban-Americans to send money to, or even visit, relatives living in Cuba. This was on top of over 40 years of economic and cultural/political blockade.

I am decidedly not in favor of these policies, which seem to me and many others to be deeply flawed. However, my interest here is not in such policies, but in my address at the conference itself. I began my address with a statement of political and educational solidarity with the people in the audience—most of whom were educators—and with the