

Why a Deterritorialized Curriculum?

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What is the role of critical theory in the field of Curriculum? What is the “relevance” of curricula in social transformation?

Those questions surround Professor João M. Paraskeva’s thinking. He is a curriculum scholar who absolutely fits with these times of internationalization. Born in, Maputo Mozambique, where he finished his elementary and high school, he continued his studies at the Portuguese Catholic University in Portugal and at the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal. A professor at University of Minho, he also taught in Southern Africa, Brazil, Spain, and Italy before moving to the U.S. He was a Visiting Professor at Miami University Oxford, Ohio and then he joined the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. Currently he is a Full Professor, founder and Chair of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at UMass Dartmouth. His most recent work is *The Curriculum: Decanonizing the Field*. New York: Peter Lang.

Paraphrasing him, the field’s DNA is labeled by theoretical disputes, as are most of the papers of curriculum theory scholars. The book *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory: Challenging Hegemonic Epistemologies* also brings up theories as a field of disputes, as “a critical curriculum river” (p. 1) in the author’s sharp style and pointed language. As the author presents his investigation, moving back and forward in history towards an itinerant curriculum theory (hereafter ICT) that flowed in the “critical curriculum river”, the book assigns a vast significance to the concept of curriculum and retells the history of the field with a particular inspiration: the idea of crisis. ICT, Paraskeva claims, is ‘a’ future for the field of curriculum studies. As Paraskeva says, he prefers “the crisis. It is the crises that allow inclusively the silences of the debates, however it cannot allow silencing the conversation. That is a tragedy.” (p. 143).

This short essay offers a critical overview of João M. Paraskevas book *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory: Challenging Hegemonic Epistemologies* inviting TCI followers to a new reading of his theories under a different approach of the postcolonial dialogues, above all, acknowledging its contemporaneity, complexity and the uses of the idea of epistemicide to give texture to the dialogues about internationalization. The foreword to *Conflicts in Curriculum Theory: Challenging Hegemonic Epistemologies* is written by Donaldo Macedo and underlines Paraskeva’s contribution to curriculum theory by bringing historicity to the field’s debates. More than answers, the book raises many thought-provoking questions about the theories, the field, and the multiple meanings of the concept in exploring the work of some remarkable and other not-so-famous curriculum theorists



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since the eighteenth century. Professor Paraskeva goes over the history of the field with neither a linear nor evolutive approach, but with the deepness of historicity and complexity of a dialectic method picturing the field of dispute with the overarching vision of a navigator and the profoundness of the scavenger.

Donaldo Macedo, another important public intellectual and educational theorist who translated Paulo Freire into English, summarizes the author's work saying that he "rigorously unpacks the writing of dominant ideologies and intellectuals who have proclaimed both history and ideology dead" (p. ix). In fact, thanks to this statement it becomes easier to understand with whom both scholars are debating. In his own words, Paraskeva states that

In fact, what this book aims to do is to (1) put into historical context the emergence and development of the history of the field; (2) unveil the emergence of a group of critical theorists within the curriculum field; (3) offer a new metaphor of the field as "a critical curriculum river" that meanders extensively to help understand these theorists' complex journey, including the battles fought for control of the field; and (4) examine and lay out a critique of the reconceptualist movement. Furthermore, I argue in this book that the future of critical curriculum theory needs to overcome such tensions, twists, and contradictions and engage in the creation of an itinerant curriculum theory that must be committed to the struggle against epistemicides. (p. 1)

Yes, the book is like a "road map" for understanding the context of the field, particularly in U.S., as a socio-historical *constructo*. Learning from the author multiples understandings of curriculum through his particular and complex vision of the field of studies as a field of disputes and conflicts, a "self-conscious field of study" that actually

does not owe itself exclusively to this or to that other work, to this or to that other author, but to a combination of studies, works, intellectuals, and social events that would take determining steps toward what would constitute the curriculum field in the twentieth century. (p. 51)

In "Chapter I: Nature of Conflict" the author illustrates Karl Marx's historic materialism while confronting the idea that school curriculum is absent of conflict. In the author's analysis, the conflict was undertaken by theories and the history of the field like something not formative that should be repressed. Conflict, also understood as a method, is a contend. Its absence aims

[t]o divorce the educator's educational existence from his political existence is to forget that education, as an act of influence, is inherently a political act, as has been insightfully argued by some of the major exponents of the critical curriculum river. (p. 13)

Theoretically explained because of the domination of positivism that framed the field and stuffed non-critical curricula, this process influenced all disciplines and contends by abducting historicity and context from them. In this sense, the author seems to agree with Henry Giroux in understanding schools as "a social construct that serves to mystify rather than illuminate reality" (p. 22). At times in the nineteenth century in the U.S. history, the political-social project, based on controlling curricula in order to achieve uniformity, standardization, and conformity, was enacted reinforcing the disciplinarity and



the control of knowledge through the nineteenth century as the author explores in the second chapter. Later, he reinforces this idea by declaring, “The lack of consensus about what should be taught in the schools highlights the need for a serious debate about school content” (p. 149). To recognize “the powerful relation of conflict that is established between the hidden curriculum and the knowledge relayed in schools” (p. 14) in its dialogism and tensions (p. 19) is not only to understand the role of criticism as a theory but to take *critique* as a tool to fight against reproduction and domination.

In this direction, Paraskeva argues that there is a claim by critical progressive curriculum scholars for social justice and equality embedded in this debate bringing to the forefront the concepts of ideology, hegemony, common sense, hidden curriculum, power, reproduction, resistance, transformation, emancipation, class, gender, and race, among others (p. 20), which reshaped the field in the 80s and 90s. He points to today’s main goals for critical progressive educators as being social justice and real democracy, which are not possible without cognitive justice (p. 21).

This is a towering issue in Paraskeva’s ICT rationale. As he claim, the struggle for curriculum justice which is a struggle for social justice implies a struggle for cognitive justice. This is one of the pillars of Paraskeva’s deterritorialized ICT.

In his profound, sometimes dark—but not pessimistic—criticism, the author analyzes the present and prophesizes a close-at-hand future in which school could possibly have a powerful role in society. In our historically fabricated society:

In a spaceless world (Bauman, 2004) profoundly segregated by neoliberal globalization doctrine, critical pedagogy, in its different windows (Kincheloe, 1991), more than ever before needs to win the battle to democratize democracy. The schools and the curriculum have a key role in such a struggle (cf. Counts, 1932)—in fact, the reinvigoration of the Left, as Aronowitz (2001) argues, depends on this. (p. 21)

Wisely, Paraskeva engages politically in arguments to show how curriculum is a field of conflicts in all its aspects. For him,

[t]he need to fight for an education system that would challenge savage social inequalities (Kozol, 1992), that would provide the proper political tools to “read the word and the world” (Freire, 1998), that would challenge the pedagogy of the big lies and the positivist trap that has been dominating the educational apparatus (Macedo, 2006) was inevitable. (p. 14)

In the third and fourth chapters and further on, the theoretical exegesis made by Paraskeva evolves through the twentieth century, analyzing the scientific curriculum fever, and championed the importance of the civil rights movement, and the romantic critics in the struggle over the U.S. curriculum; he also examined the emergence and questioning of Tyler’s dominant position. While explaining the debates and ideas, the author highlights the torrential and calm currents, seeking the emergence of a “specific critical progressive curriculum river ... [that] cannot be marginalized” (p. 42). He illustrates his work with deep historical research and erudition.

According to Paraskeva, the industrialism, on one hand, and the claims for educational training and social equality, on the other, create the demand for a whole school system and feed it with permanent tension. Also, Sputnik and the Vietnam War are issues well examined for him as a critical theorist who invested in historicity and dialogism.



Others curriculum theorists ideas about education and social equality seem to be not so democratically inspired; as Paraskeva points out, this whole way of thinking is full of conflicts and came from

... a movement that was, in fact, emerging as a cure for delinquent children, children of the poorer class, immigrants and racial minorities, and as the “socially correct” answer for how to integrate the American Indians and African-Americans who continued to work for the actualization of the freedom they nominally had won in 1865. (p. 43)

Some scholars, understanding that education could be an effective tool to change society (shape civilization, p. 53) and improve equality, became dominant but were not in unison, so that this dominance was built over all kinds of conflicts about the role of culture and the primacy of science, among others. Those multiple understandings of the relationship between education and society not only shaped the debates on curriculum for many years but as the author clearly demonstrates, one relegates all other notions of curriculum to a less important role. In one epoch, the major investment was in vocational curricula, which was then also criticized by John Dewey, complex, humanist, swimming into the river of progressivism, arguing that the curriculum directed only toward technical efficiency makes education “an instrument of perpetuating unchanged the existing order of society instead of operating as a means of its transformation” (pp. 48, 119–122).

In the ground of the debate, the author seems to conclude that despite all the efforts to develop curricula, methods, objectives, and evaluation forms and reformulate the relationship between education and society oriented by audacious ideals (p. 69), education was taken as a simplistic tool and totally inadequate to answer what the industrialism, “a lethal phenomenon” demanded.

Against that view and defending critical theory, Torres (1998) honors the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire as one of the main critical inspirations and references in the field and states that critical studies provide “the necessary tools to fully understand and combat the relationship between education and unequal cultural, political and economic power” (Torres, 1998: p. 15). Navigating the same “non-monolithic yet powerful progressive critical curriculum river,” Paraskeva (p. 75) confronted those ideas, and the established tradition. Going over U.S. curriculum reforms and debates, Paraskeva teases out the strings of different tendencies and interpretations that will allow the field to canonize Taylor as well as Freire. For him, this is how the field’s DNA was constituted in its endemic part: conflict and dispute.

Chapter five goes further, analyzing the dialogues about the relationship society-education and emphasizing the tensions in curricular debates. Paraskeva explains that the field was highly developed, not just because of the importance that the relationship society-education attributed to it but also because of the investments made by U.S. government to develop a field of curriculum knowledge and development—shaped by the ideas of efficiency, uniformization, and occupational training demanded by the continued industrial advance and diversification. For sure, there was also criticism, humanism, diversity, democracy, and the acknowledgement of the contents of race and others in the same context and within the same curriculum disputes generating many theoretical disputes.

A not-meaningless preoccupation—does high school adequately prepare students for their future? (p. 79)—embedded the debate among the dominant form of curriculum understanding called “life adjustment education” (p. 77) and others. For Paraskeva,



although the theoretical hegemony hadn't been really menaced, the major perception was of the lag between the demands of democracy and the schools' capacity to meet such demands (p. 81):

[T]he years from 1947 until 1970 were the most transformative in the history of curriculum since the era of Bobbitt and Charters. It is important to notice the ideological umbrella that was formed, which included scientific curriculum-making, of which Tyler was the major spokesperson, along with the behavioral objectives curriculum, a return to testing, discipline-centered curriculum movements (a return to the disciplines of knowledge), right-wing and reactionary sentiments to remove any progressive elements and cold war warriors (p. 92).

Struggling for curriculum relevance in chapter six, Paraskeva maps out some of the key names of a specific radical critical curriculum river. He claims:

While critical theorists come from a number of traditions, the river metaphor helps show how these traditions flow both together and individually in the history of the field. Although this group of scholars has never occupied a dominant position in the field, it is undeniable how much they have contributed to the struggle for a more just curriculum. (p. 2)

Undoubtedly, Brazilian and non-US readers will be surprised by Paraskeva's assertion above, but this is what makes the reading even more interesting for both countries' scholars, teachers, students, and actually any reader who wants to problematize contemporary society and history and understands the internationalization and the localisms of the field of curriculum.

The Brazilian scholar Alice Lopes (2013) argues in a recent article that currently in Brazilian curriculum studies, debates between critical and postcritical scholars persist. She remarks on the influence that Tomás Tadeu da Silva's translations and articles had in establishing the canons of the field in a opposite direction that what happened in U.S.' field; as showed by Paraskeva's research. Silva is a curriculum theorist, translator, publisher, and an intellectual deeply concerned with politics has succeeded in tilting the field in favor of the critical theorists, as defended by Lopes (2013). In fact, Silva, one of the more important Brazilian curriculum scholars, wrote emblematic books that became major points of references in teacher education curriculum. He pointed out the supremacy of critical theory and mapped the field's debates during the 1980s and 1990s. Paraskeva and Silva have an ongoing dialogue. According to Paraskeva,

[w]e cannot understand this radical critical tradition within the curriculum field specifically and education in general unless we understand the counter-hegemonic traditions both within and outside curriculum in informal struggles related to unions, civil rights, etc. (p. 130)

The struggles about curriculum relevance, as presented by Paraskeva, are in a way what he calls the romantic critic (surely not homogeneous) fights "against the alienation of youth that was perpetuated by an irrelevant pedagogy" (p. 100) or even a more virulent understanding of students as victims of a "punitive" pedagogy (p. 102). The author highlights the role of the civil rights history of fights and ideas in the main debates about education and throughout some theorists' work. Describing, contextualizing, and analyzing decades of events and crisis in the field of curriculum, the author proves that the debates on



critical theories as well as some reconceptualists' concern with the need for curriculum relevance is related to the fight for social justice and can be identified in the civil rights movement. For the author, this context "should not be dissociated from the student activist movement, which associated itself with the black cause, finding within the human rights movement the impetus for its own demands" (p. 99). This also reinforces the author's thesis about the field's dynamics and composition:

These crises seem to be in its very DNA: permanent conflict, permanent crisis, a permanent search for meaning, permanent contradictions—in essence, a permanently unstable condition. (p. 144)

Again, by telling the history and analyzing and contributing to a complex understanding of the field's conflicts, and also by recognizing the role and plurality within critical theory, mainly this specific critical river that is thoroughly analyzed in its specificity in chapter seven, Paraskeva contends that

[t]o claim that we are before a non-monolithic critical curriculum river within the progressive tradition that is hooked on a political approach towards schools and curriculum, seems not only inaccurate and reductive, but also minimizes important political approaches that one could identify in other progressive perspectives. (p. 111)

As a feature of the field, the practical and theoretical diversity discussion ends by engaging the field in a "composite approach that incorporates critical and post-structural perspective," (p. 115), which sums up the focus of Paraskeva's last two chapters. He definitely valorizes the role of critical theorists and theories in struggling for curriculum relevance that propels a theoretical movement towards the undeniably and potentially infinite epistemological diversity of the world (p. 152). I could say towards curricula relevance stressing Paraskeva's own cognitive justice perspective: "The task is to fight for cognitive diversity" as "the best way for schools to fight for a just and equal society—especially when facing the impact of neo-radical centrist policies and strategies," (pp. 152, 153).

Concluding, I wish to say that the debates presented in the last two chapters "The Emergence and Vitality of a Specific Critical Curriculum River," and "Challenging Epistemicides: Toward an Itinerant Curriculum Theory" are the apex of the book, which is really a work that goes beyond American history in setting up dilemmas for curriculum internationalization. While interweaving Brazilian, African, American and European authors, experiences and documents, reforms, and debates, Paraskeva dialogues with distinguish critical theorists in Spain, Canada, and England, redirecting the field's discussions towards social justice and historicity awareness. He does that also giving relevance to Dwayne Huebner's materialism (p. 135) as a landmark in the field. Then, he "trace[s] the roots of this critical progressive river by digging around in the so-called socio-reconstructionist movement" (p. 115), confronting the "nightmare of the present, as Pinar (2004) puts it" (p. 151) to stand up for the critical theories, theorists, and tools, rewriting the idea of power by the astute use of postcolonial arguments (p. 157) and Boaventura Sousa Santos's matrices such as the epistemicide, which wonderfully fits with curriculum debates oriented towards social and cognitive justice. There is a river, Paraskeva argues, a river flooded by non-monolithic radical critical perspectives whose legacy needs to be preserved. However such task implies to move the theoretical debate to a different path, one



that is fully deterritorialized and allows the natural emergence of an itinerant theoretical path – an Itinerant Curriculum Theory a clear challenge to the Western abyssal curriculum thinking. And then, by acknowledging William Pinar’s complicated conversation, he vaticinates that

[W]e must ask if this international conversation is challenging what Sousa Santos (2007) denounced as epistemicides. Is it engaged in opening up the canon of knowledge? Or, as we fear—and we hope we are wrong—is it an attempt to edify a new canon? If so, it would be a disaster. (p. 145)

Why a deterritorialized curriculum? Weaving together postcolonial references, doing the sociology of emergence to overcome the western epistemicidal hegemony and the power of scientific thinking, Paraskeva argues about the need for critical theories that challenge the representationism that, citing Deleuze, “does not capture the global scale of difference” (p. 173). And so, by taking advantage of “Western scientific hegemonic dominance [that] is facing a profound crisis of epistemological confidence” (p. 181), Paraskeva’s evaluation is that “we need a curriculum theory and practice that re-escalate their very own territorialities, which reflects an awareness that the new order and counter-order must be seen within the framework of power relations” (p. 176).

As we can see, Paraskeva expands this idea to meet the needs of an itinerant curriculum theorist—who’s able to speak languages other than English (p. 178, linguistic genocide p. 179). Paraskeva’s curriculum proposal decolonizes theoretical and methodological frameworks (p. 182) and also explains by

[t]aking the example of teacher education, deterritorialized curriculum theory is exploring new ways of thinking and feeling and finding ways to produce new and different purposes of mind ... giv[ing] voice to an engineering of differences by deterritorializing itself and looking for new ways of thinking and feeling about education. (p. 174)

In one more glimpse:

The point is to assume a posture that slides constantly among several epistemological frameworks, thus giving one better tools to interpret schools as social formations. Such a theoretical posture might be called a “deterritorialized” [curriculum theory].... Conceptualizing it in this way can profoundly help one to grasp the towering concepts, such as hegemony, ideology, social emancipation, and power, more fully. (p. 151)

As highlighted by Donaldo Macedo, Paraskeva denounces the “culture of positivism” that aims to control and dominate the world, currently one of the three major issues in the field. For those scholars concerned with social and cognitive justice and epistemological diversity, there are two other major issues spotlighted and confronted by Paraskeva: the undeniable political role of intellectuals, and the primacy of “power” as a main category to understand curriculum, education, and world context and history:

One of the most powerful leitmotifs of this critical curriculum river is the struggle for curriculum relevance—that is, for a just curriculum that can foster equality, democracy, and social justice. At the forefront of this struggle are the valuable



contributions of intellectuals such as Dewey, Washington, Du Bois, Bode, Counts, Rugg, Huebner, Macdonald, Wexler, Aronowitz, Giroux, McLaren, and Apple, among others. The civil rights movement, the so-called romantic critics, and the Highlander Folk School also have had a profound impact. Grounded in different epistemological terrains, each of these scholars and movements was able to construct sharp challenges to an obsolete and positivistic functionalist school system, despite receiving severe criticism from counter-dominant perspectives. Each one was in fact quite successful in claiming the need to understand schools and curriculum within the dynamics of ideological production. (p. 2)

I fully recommend the book not only to American scholars and members of the public who are interested in curriculum, but also to all readers concerned with democracy and education. Being especially rich for Brazilian curriculum scholars, the book is an opportunity to engage with a complex reading of Marxism and a little more about cognitive justice and furthermore consider the proposal of a deterritorialized curriculum theory (p.114). It is also, an opportunity to grapple with a hard, dry and deep criticism that arises from an acknowledged erudition and profound knowledge of the field's theorists. Professor Paraskeva's irony and sarcasm seems to be a beautiful strategy to scape from a metatheoretical discourse, a risk of the critical approach with the "call for the democratization of knowledges that is a commitment to an emancipatory, non-relativistic, cosmopolitan ecology of knowledges" (p. 154).

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the contemporaneity of the book by underlining that it is based on a materialistic critique of all aspects of American democracy; it revives Paulo Freire's legacy; and it renews the internationalization debate, pulling together all strings of critical thinking, magisterially crowned with the use of Boaventura de Sousa Santos's idea of "epistemicide" (p. 155).

Also, it is undeniable that Paraskeva's political discourse has commonalities with the thinking of Noam Chomsky and Slavoj Žižek, two of the most crucial guides for the understanding of complexity and fragmentation of the world today. Paraskeva's theory is a dialogue with southern epistemologies—he cites specifically "some interesting and powerful curriculum research platforms emerging in Brazil" (p. 150)—and is a fruitful initiative to grow the efforts to realize that the knowledge of the world, and curricula, are things that go much further than western/northern understandings of them (Santos, 2013, p. 25).

He concludes the book with a post-abysal question: "Dare the schools build a new social order?" (p. 188). And he complements and complicates this question by saying "the struggle against epistemicides will allow us to highlight and learn how science was powerful in what is considered pre-colonial" (p. 162) and thrown through the abyss of non-existence or non-knowledge (Santos, p. 23). For Paraskeva,

The new itinerant curriculum theory will challenge one of the fundamental characteristic of abyssal thinking: the impossibility of co-presence of the two sides of the line. (p. 188)

When it comes to thinking about current policies on curriculum and belief in the "reinvent[ion] [of] a democratized democracy" (p. 172) and co-presence, the contemporariness of Professor Paraskeva's thinking gains new strength by the potential power of the critical theory worldview against the epistemicide of positivism, both



historically and in its current manifestation, a new tsunami internationalizing standardized assessments, national curricula, and the unacknowledgment of teacher's work.

Notes

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