

# Towards a Curriculum of the Heart: Thinking, Growing, Feeling, and Connecting in Contemporary Education

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## Introduction

Over the past century, curriculum and educational scholars have presented and debated various conceptions of curriculum (Schiro, 2008). While some theorists have argued for specific schools of curricular thought (e.g., Tyler, 2009/1949), others have sought to identify, organize, and categorize assorted philosophies and ideologies (e.g., Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Schiro, 2008). In addition to illuminating diverse visions for public education, curricular conversations have brought forth questions regarding the purpose of education and the role that schools play in the growth and development of students. Curricular orientations such as “self-actualization” (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Sowell, 2005), “individual fulfillment” (Pratt, 1994), “personal success” (Vallance, 1986), “learner centered” (Schiro, 2008), and “humanistic” (McNeil, 2006) have concentrated on the individual development of students, emphasizing personal growth and advocating that schools should provide students with the conditions in which learners can achieve their full personal potential. Moving away from the individual and toward society as a whole, conceptions such as “social reconstruction” (McNeil, 2006; Schiro, 2008; Vallance, 1986), “social-relevance reconstruction” (Sowell, 2005), and “social transformation” (Pratt, 1994) have illuminated schools as instruments for social reform, where the needs of society act as a driving force for teaching and learning. Moreover, academic-driven curricular stances, such as “academic rationalism” (Vallance, 1986), “cumulative tradition of organized knowledge” (Sowell, 2005), and “scholar academic” (Schiro, 2008), have focused on cultural transmission and the need for schools to transfer knowledge and skills associated with the established academic disciplines (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, etc.). While these and other conceptions of curriculum provide scholars, educators, and members of the general public with various educational standpoints with which to identify and relate to, they have also been and continue to be at the heart of many educational debates (Pratt, 1994; Schiro, 2008). Currently, curricular orientations appear to divide individual-, society-, and academic-driven schools of thought, essentially presenting these notions as separate and mutually exclusive. In addition, academic-driven ideologies have historically held a dominant role within curricular conversations and remain at the forefront of contemporary education today (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996; Sowell, 2005). With educators operating within a single dominant curricular conception, and theorists contending with diverging curricular thought, both theorists and educators have been unable to settle on a single curricular orientation or negotiated compromise (Schiro,



2008). The result of these intersecting dilemmas is a set of tensions that result in an unbalanced system, rather than a creative outcome.

It has been said, “with every good learning experience, a place of difficulty causes us to attend to what matters” (Irwin, 2003, p. 76). In this paper, I explore the tensions embedded within my own experiences as both a learner and a teacher as they relate to curriculum theory and contemporary education. I argue that students growing up today suffer from an unbalanced education system, characterized by a curriculum that is becoming increasingly standardized and impersonal. To help regain balance and to provide students with a more holistic education, I propose a conception of curriculum that strives to nurture students who are happy, healthy, and well; a curriculum that focuses on thinking, growing, feeling, and connecting. I propose a curriculum of the heart.

### **An Unbalanced System**

*I sit at the kitchen table, colorful markers and paper scattered in front of me on the flat wooden surface. Sunlight reaches through the large windows above the sink, warming the room and my body within it. I sift through the Mr. Sketch markers looking for the perfect color to start my drawing. I have decided to make a card for my best friend Erin. She will be six soon and I want to make her something special. In the window, a long string of glass prisms hang. Rainbows scatter on the opposite wall as the sun beams through the hanging crystals and into the open space. Inspired by the dancing rainbows in the room, I begin to draw colorful bands across the top of the folded paper.*

*Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Purple. Pink.*

*The pink marker is my favorite, not because I like the color best but because I enjoy the fruity smell it releases when I draw with it. I know that I am not the best writer at school, but I am great at making cards at home. I have even learned how to spell “Happy Birthday!” without any help. When the rainbow is complete, I draw a yellow sun in the remaining space. I use a black marker to add two eyes, a nose, and a large smile to the yellow circle. With the black marker still in hand, I open the card and in the empty space write the words:*

*“To Erin, Happy Birthday! Love Heather.”*

...

*I sit at a circle table in the school library. A book about chipmunks rests open in front of me, lined paper and a pencil lay beside it. I am in the library with my class to work on a research project; we have been asked to write a report about an animal that can be found in the Canadian wild. While I love visiting the city library downtown, I do not feel as comfortable in this space. I cannot relax here and constantly question my movements.*

*Am I allowed to choose this book?*

*Am I allowed to speak with my friends?*

*Am I allowed to ask for help?*

*I know that I do not read or spell as well as some of the other students in my class. I wish I could draw a picture to help me represent my thinking but I am not allowed to because this is Grade 3. I want to explain that chipmunks survive the winter by sleeping for long periods of time. Hibernation is what it is called. But I don't know how to spell that word. I try to sound it out, but really have no idea where to start.*

*I need help.*



*I muster up the courage to ask the librarian; she does not look happy when she notices my hand raised up in the air.*

*“How do you spell hibernation?”*

*“Look it up in a dictionary. That’s what they’re there for.”*

*The librarian walks away. I am left feeling lost, embarrassed, and uncomfortable. How can I look up a word if I don’t know how it is spelled?*

As a child, home was always a creative space for me. My parents encouraged my siblings and I to engage in open-ended activities and to play in creative ways. Home was a happy and safe place, a place where I felt comfortable and confident to ask questions, to try new things, and to explore the world around me. Much like the early learning described by Katz (2007), learning within this context was grounded within my lived experiences. Similarly, these endeavors were connected to hands-on interactions with people and place (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Smith, 2002). Reflecting on this time, I have come to realize that the type of learning I engaged in at home was emergent and exploratory in nature. Play, art, and music were at the center of many of my experiences, and my indoor and outdoor explorations were driven by curiosity, wonder, and a strong desire to learn. At home, I was supported by adults who displayed respect and care towards me. Moreover, I was encouraged to develop my own personal signature (Eisner, 2002a) with which to approach the world, a signature that was both supported and appreciated.

I do not remember being unhappy at school as a child, but it was never a place where I felt totally comfortable. In contrast to my learning experiences at home, school had many rules and expectations to which I easily conformed. Although I loved learning, school quickly became a place where I was made aware of my shortcomings: I was shy; I was quiet; I was not a good reader, writer, or speller. While I recognize today that I do not read as fast or, perhaps, as well as some of my peers and colleagues, it is not a trait that defines me. But, as a child it was. The impact of such thinking and the development of a negative self-concept with regard to my literacy abilities in childhood persisted throughout elementary school, high school, and into much of my adult life. Looking back on my early school experiences, I realize that there are many similarities between my formal education and Tyler’s (2009/1949) inflexible conception of curriculum. My memory of the school itself is reflective of the image painted in Jackson’s (1968) “Daily Grind.” Education in my early years was about learning the disciplines in a rigid and sterile environment. The educational aims and objectives enforced by teachers at my school were designed to fit one type of learner, with one type of learning style, and one way of displaying knowledge. While I vaguely remember being a part of an elementary school choir, artistry and creativity were more often than not limited to the rules and outlines of assignments. My teachers were not willing to stray far from the curriculum-as-plan (Aoki, 2005b/1986/1991) and were seemingly unresponsive to students, like myself, who needed individualized help or, more precisely, had different ways of learning. The teachers simply adhered to what they had always done, year after year, student after student.

Although my experiences with formal education hold personal meaning, they are not unique and most likely mirror the experiences of many children within contemporary education. While various conceptions of curriculum have been highlighted in educational literature and implemented into schools over the years (e.g., Pratt, 1994; Sowell, 2005; Vallance, 1986), the dominant academic rationalist paradigm so prominent in my Ontario public schooling in the 1980s and 1990s is still visible in present times (Sowell, 2005). In fact, Tyler “remains an enormous figure, whose



shadow is very much cast still today” (Pinar et al., 1996, p. 857). Within this academic-driven conception of curriculum, education is seen as a means of transmitting cultural heritage and a way of cultivating cognitive achievement and intellect through the study of the disciplines (e.g., mathematics, language; Pratt, 1994; Sowell, 2005). This type of curriculum lends itself well to didactic modes of teaching and learning, where students take a more passive role in the learning process and where teachers and textbooks are the ultimate source of knowledge (Pratt, 1994). Pinar et al. (1996) maintain:

Curriculum is an extraordinarily complicated conversation. Curriculum as institutional text is a formalized and abstract version of conversation, a term we usually use to refer to those open-ended, highly personal, and interest-driven events in which persons encounter each other. That curriculum has become so formalized and distant from the everyday sense of conversation is a profound indication of its institutionalization and its bureaucratization. Instead of employing others’ conversations to enrich our own, we “instruct” students to participate in others’—i.e. textbook authors’—conversations, employing others’ terms to others’ ends. (p. 848)

While I do not disagree that students need to acquire some important academic skills (such as reading and writing) to reach their full potential and to participate fully within society, I cannot ignore the emotional, motivational, and affective elements that contemporary education should be fostering within our students—elements that are too often ignored within academic-driven conceptions of curriculum, but undoubtedly contribute to students’ overall happiness, health, and well-being. A curriculum that accentuates academic achievement in isolation is insufficient for the development of the whole child. Such a curriculum fails to include important aspects of human learning and personality (Pratt, 1994), and ignores the inextricable links among academic knowledge, subjectivity, and society (Pinar, 2005).

Within most schools and educational institutions, standards and accountability frameworks have become common practice, and implemented to ensure consistent, quality education (Bredenkamp, 2014). While these structures warrant responsibility and transparency among stakeholders within classrooms and schools, they also present potential barriers that may limit the creation of democratic educational spaces (e.g., McLennan, 2009) and may diminish the ability for individuals to reach their full potential (Noddings, 2009/2003; Pratt, 1994; Sowell, 2005). Eisner (2002b) echoes these concerns arguing that contemporary schooling tends to emphasize the constructs of facticity, correctness, linearity, and concreteness. Consequently, by focusing on these ideas, education fails to nurture a human capacity, an element central to our cultural development (Eisner, 2002b).

Within this rigid structure of standardization, I am left thinking about my own early learning experiences as they relate to public education today. I question: Is there room for curiosity and wonder within our dominant conception of curriculum? Do students feel connected to people and place? Are students encouraged to take risks and do they feel supported when they step outside of their comfort zones to learn about the world? Do students feel comfortable and safe? Are we providing the space and time for students to develop their own personal signatures with which to approach the world? Are students happy, healthy, and well?

In 2016, the Public Health Agency of Canada released a report based on the most recent survey cycle of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC; Freeman, King, & Pickett). Focusing on the health and well-being of young



Canadians, the survey results from over 29,700 students (aged 11 to 15 years) point to several areas of concern. Only 47% of Grade 6 boys and 36% of Grade 6 girls strongly agreed that they had confidence in themselves. These numbers substantially dropped with age with only 24% of Grade 10 boys and 12% of Grade 10 girls reporting confidence (Morrison & Peterson, 2016). At school, a substantial proportion of children reported feeling excess pressure with regards to their expected schoolwork, with over 1 in 4 students overall and more than 1 in 3 Grade 10 girls reporting they had more school work than they could handle. Moreover, Canadian youth in the later grades were much less likely to enjoy school or report positive perceptions of school than their younger counterparts. These findings highlight the necessity for educators to create learning environments that effectively meet the needs of students throughout the grades levels (Klinger, Reid, & Freeman, 2016). While these outcomes highlight only some of the findings from the HBSC study, they clearly point to symptoms of an unbalanced system.

Noticeably, the health and well-being of young Canadians is an issue that requires immediate attention. The obvious challenge is how to restore an unhealthy system and, ultimately, how to create curricular balance for all students. Education should not only support the development of cognitive knowledge and skills, but also take into account other aspects of human development, such as relationship building, interactions with the natural world, emotional awareness, and human thriving (e.g., Benson & Scales, 2009; Coe, 2016; Noddings, 2013; Thayer-Bacon, 2004). Similar to Pratt's (1994) description of the Individual Fulfillment conception of curriculum, the education system should help support and encourage students to reach their full potential, whatever that may be. To do this, curriculum needs to be conceptualized in a more holistic way, integrating social, cognitive, affective, somatic, aesthetic, and spiritual aspects of being (Pratt). Noddings (2013) supports the notion of a more holistic and well-rounded approach to education:

Education is not simply one agency with a specific purpose within an enormous bureaucracy. Education is a multi-aim enterprise, and it is time that we recognize that fact and build on it. Schools must address the needs of students for satisfying lives in all three great dimensions of contemporary life: Home and family, occupational, and civic, both domestic and global. (Noddings, 2013, p. viii)

Providing students with a more balanced curriculum and a healthier education system does not require starting over. Instead, efforts to rebalance and improve the system should build on established foundations (Pinar et al., 1996), using ideals from the current world as a guide (Noddings, 2013).

## **Regaining Balance**

*I sit on a small child-sized chair in the corner of the Kindergarten classroom. From here, I can see the entire indoor space. Currently, the students in my class are all engaged in activities of their own choosing; it is our daily time for exploratory play. On a table in the far corner, I can see two children with rulers measuring a stuffed shark. On the carpet beside me, blue fabric is spread out to form an imaginary ocean. Within the waves, children with scuba equipment fashioned from milk containers and string swim in and among the toy sharks and fish. In the corner of the room, several children sit on pillows reading a book about sharks. On the table in front of me, two children tape together large pieces of grey paper; they are planning to make a life-sized*



*Wobbegong Shark. Engulfed by a common interest, it is clear to me that the young children in my class are happy and motivated to learn. Later this morning, we are having a shark expert from the local aquarium visit our classroom. She is bringing real shark eggs that the children will have a chance to touch and feel.*

*I know that my students will love this experience.*

*I can't wait to see the smiles on their faces.*

*In my classroom, we are learning about the world together, through our interests and in-depth projects. There is a sense of engagement, empowerment, and excitement in the classroom. You can almost feel the energy. Within this space, we can do anything.*

...

*I sit on a large black chair in my office at the Faculty of Education. My computer rests open on my desk in front of me; a black cursor flashes on a blank page beckoning for my attention. My eyes, however, are drawn beyond my desk and into the outdoor courtyard. There is a chipmunk sitting on a large rock just outside my window; it seems fitting how he has appeared after reminiscing about the past. While this small creature was once a regular visitor to the same spot through the summer and autumn months, this is the first time I have seen him since the snow has started to melt. His appearance is a reminder of the rhythms and cycles of nature. There are many spaces in this building where I feel disconnected from the natural world, but the large window in my office provides a nice retreat. I am able to write and to be a part of the greater world simultaneously. Returning to the task at hand, I bring my attention back to my computer and the papers and books scattered on my desk.*

*I am thinking about curriculum.*

*After reading about various conceptions of curriculum, I wonder: where do I situate myself as a scholar within the curriculum landscape? I find that I am drawn to certain words, phrases, and concepts within the current conceptions—ideas that reflect my beliefs about education that can be linked to my past experiences and the tensions embedded within them. Words such as happiness, compassion, and care leap off the pages of articles and books. Notions such as curriculum as lived experience and student health and well-being resonates within me. The belief that early experience can have a lifelong impact on learning and self-concept never strays far from my mind. I feel as though I am moving towards an understanding that is essentially a curriculum of the heart.*

*As humans, the heart is a vital part of our bodies.*

*Without it, there is no life.*

*The heart pumps and beats transporting nutrients to all parts of our body. The heart is at the center of our being both physically and emotionally. The heart represents life, health, emotions, and connections. I envision that a curriculum of the heart embraces all of these things:*

*Thinking, growing, feeling, and connecting.*

I have always loved working with children. I find the energy and enthusiasm with which young learners approach the world to be incredibly magical. I feel fortunate when I am able to experience new adventures through their eyes. As an international school Kindergarten teacher, I witnessed connections and friendships being made as children related to one another through interests and accomplishments. I saw smiles on children's faces and felt the excitement that is so often associated with new experiences and learning. Moreover, I witnessed students grow from the beginning of the school



year to the end—entering the classroom as small children and leaving as empowered and motivated young learners. Reflecting on my experiences as an early years educator, I have come to realize that education does not need to be as rigid and structured as my elementary school experience was. Within a supportive environment, children can learn through their lived experiences and make meaningful connections with the world around them. Curriculum can be flexible, emergent, and responsive to the diverse needs and interests of students (e.g., Coe, 2016; Eisner, 2002a, 2002b; Katz, 2007).

Although I am not currently a classroom teacher, my experiences continue to influence how I approach and, ultimately, conceptualize teaching, learning, and curriculum. I gravitate towards an understanding that students' interests, questions, and sense of wonder (Carson, 1965) should be a driving force for learning. I am attracted to the idea that education can be student-centered and provide personally satisfying experiences for learners (Sowell, 2005). Additionally, I cannot argue with the notion that education should inspire a personal commitment to learning (or lifelong learning) among students (Vallance, 1986). While focusing on the individual is important, the collective also demands attention (Thayer-Bacon, 2004; Pratt, 1994). Schools play an important role in the development of positive and enriching interpersonal relationships for students. Some would argue that these relationships and the development of interpersonal skills are critical for both the well-being of students and society as a whole (Bell, 2011; Pratt, 1994). Finally, I am enthralled by the idea that happiness should be an aim of education (e.g., Hughes, 2013; Noddings, 2004). To me, this concept not only speaks to the emotional and affective aspects of teaching and learning (as seen in Aoki, 2005a/1993), but also highlights the possible need for a reconceptualization of the aims and purpose of contemporary education. With these various notions in mind, I propose a conception of curriculum that aims to embrace a more holistic perspective of education: a curriculum of the heart.

## **Towards a Curriculum of the Heart**

The human heart is made up of four chambers. Each chamber serves a purpose, pumping and receiving blood to and from the body. The heart is at the center of the pulmonary system, and through its natural rhythms, this organ feeds the body with life. If there is too much pressure or damage to one part of the heart, the system cannot function properly. If balance within the heart is not maintained, the system will eventually shut down and life will cease to be. A curriculum of the heart can be conceptualized in a comparable way. Similar to the four chambers in the human heart, four components are essential to a balanced curriculum, education, and life: *thinking*, *growing*, *feeling*, and *connecting*. Within this conception of curriculum, each component serves an important purpose, contributing to students' overall holistic development and learning. Just as the heart is at the center of the pulmonary system, the curriculum is at the heart of the education system. If there is too much pressure or focus on one component, the system cannot function properly. If this imbalance continues, students will not receive a well-rounded education and will suffer accordingly.

### ***Four Components***

A curriculum of the heart is comprised of four interconnected components: *thinking*, *growing*, *feeling*, and *connecting*. To encourage the growth and development of happy, healthy, and well students, it can be conceptualized that each component must be kept in balance with the others. This notion mirrors an idea presented by Palmer (1997) with regards to teaching:



Reduce teaching to intellect and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on each other for wholeness. They are interwoven in the human self and in education at its best, and we need to interweave them in our pedagogical discourse as well. (pp. 15-16)

Similar to the elements presented by Parker, the four components within a curriculum of the heart are connected and interwoven, each component depending on the others for wholeness. If curriculum is reduced to a single component, the system becomes unbalanced. Consequently, students will not be supported in a holistic way and may not have the opportunity to develop fully.

While the four components are interconnected, it is necessary to explore the characteristics of each alone to better understand a curriculum of the heart. These components should not be thought of in a hierarchical order, but should be considered as part of a balanced whole. In addition, the descriptive characteristics of each component is by no means exhaustive, but aims to provide a general idea and understanding of how the four components address the different aspects of human nature and learning.

First, building from the academic foundation so prominent in our public schools today, *thinking* incorporates the skills and knowledge that are so often highlighted within contemporary curricular frameworks and standards. These skills and knowledge should not only be appropriate for academic success, but also applicable to life outside of school. In addition, thinking embraces the diverse needs and interests of students, encouraging a flexible and responsive education system (Eisner, 2002a, 2002b). Furthermore, thinking involves creating, doing, and being (Schubert, 2009); it embraces the learning process and the knowledge that is gained through experience.

Second, *growing* encompasses the idea that all students should be supported and encouraged to be physically healthy and well, both in body and mind. Students should be provided with the time and encouragement to engage in various health promoting behaviors, such as physical activity and sport. In addition, growing also includes other aspects that contribute to an overall healthy lifestyle, such as rest, stress management, and a healthy diet.

Third, *feeling* embraces emotions and the aesthetic elements of learning that are so often forgotten in contemporary education (Irwin, 2003). This idea not only includes embracing and recognizing one's own emotions, but also learning to identify and appreciate the emotional needs of others. Additionally, feeling encourages students to take the time to appreciate the experience of learning and the emotions associated with it (Eisner, 2002b). Moreover, this component asks educators to consider emotional literacy and happiness (Noddings, 2004) as aims of education.

Fourth, recognizing that human beings are connected to the places and people with whom they share the world, *connecting* considers the development of positive relationships. This component highlights the importance of creating community, establishing positive teacher-student relationships, and attending to the school climate and physical contexts to ensure that all students feel encouraged and valued (Hutchinson, 2014; Thayer-Bacon, 2004). Additionally, connecting encourages a more appreciative stance with regards to the Earth and our local environment, and that a reciprocal relationship should exist between humans and the natural world (Noddings, 2013). Similarly, students should have the opportunity to connect with and learn from local people, place, and ecology—a notion that does not stray far from the concept of





place-based education (e.g., Smith, 2002). Furthermore, Parker (1997) defines spirituality as the “diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life” (p. 16). Connecting reminds us that students should be encouraged to be connect spiritually with world around them in whatever way is most meaningful to them (Pratt, 1994).

### ***The Beating Heart***

The word “curriculum” is often colloquially defined as a set of courses, coursework, and content offered by an educational institution, and the subjects that comprise a course of study (Merriam-Webster, 2013; Oxford Dictionaries, 2013; Wiktionary, 2013). Within most definitions (like the one presented here), curriculum is a noun—static, stationary, and unmoving. In alignment with this description, many teachers have come to recognize “curriculum” as what they are required to teach, mandated by those above and outlined within curriculum documents and guides (Pinar, 2012). While this understanding of curriculum is a traditional one, it fails to recognize the vibrant voices and lived experiences of students and those involved in day-to-day teaching and learning. In fact, some critics refer to this traditional view of curriculum as “disembodied,” a perspective that is oriented toward “top-down mandates and prescriptions to be carried out, repressing and controlling participation” (Latta, 2013, p. 72). In contrast to the traditional and, possibly, outdated definition, Pinar (2012) describes curriculum as a “complicated conversation:” a dynamic discussion that engages multiple voices, views, and experiences. Within this alternate definition, the notion of curriculum is shifted from a noun to a verb—active, responsive, and ongoing. Because conversations among individuals are interactive and spontaneous, curriculum, too, can be perceived as such. As a conversation, curriculum embraces complexity and is responsive to the voices of those involved in the dialogue: “[Curriculum] importantly assumes that within the inquiry process lives a worthwhile direction, a medium for teaching and learning that asks teachers and students to participate through adapting, changing, building and creating meaning together” (Latta, 2013, p. 2).

Within a curriculum of the heart, *curriculum* is viewed as a process, “a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope” (Pinar, 2005, p. 41). This process embraces the idea that lived experience is essential to understanding (Ellsworth, 2005), and that curriculum becomes embodied and alive through the daily rhythms and patterns of teaching and learning. With each beat of the balanced of the heart, students are supported holistically in the process of being and becoming (Aoki, 2005a/1993).

Teachers are fundamental to this process. Their actions are like the blood that flows through the human heart, always present and full of nutrients. To fully support learners, teachers must recognize the individuality and uniqueness of each student, an idea that diverges from a common conception of curriculum-as-plan which assumes a disembodied “fiction of sameness” (Aoki, 2005b/1986/1991, p. 161). To nurture ethical attitudes, foster the development of emotional literacy, support cognitive development, and encourage positive interactions among students, teachers must strive to create environments that are welcoming, safe, caring, compassionate, and critical (Conrad, 2006; Klinger, Mills, & Chapman, 2011). Essentially, “if education is to have a transformative impact in the lives of youth, our institutions must live what they hope to teach” (Conrad, 2006, p. 16).

A curriculum of the heart strives to bring balance to education for all students. While it may seem simple in theory, it may not be as easy in practice. To implement such a curriculum requires dedication and ongoing adjustments to ensure that a balance is maintained. Noddings (2009/2003) warns, “without continual, reflective discussion of



aims, education may become a poor substitute for its best vision” (p. 426). Similarly, without continual reflection, discussion, and appraisal of how *thinking*, *growing*, *feeling*, and *connecting* are being addressed, a curriculum of the heart may become unbalanced and fail to provide students with a holistic education. A curriculum of the heart requires dedication from teachers, administration, and support staff. Eisner (2002a) argues that good teaching requires both artistry and professional judgment—qualities that are also needed to make educational policy, as well as to establish personal relationships with students and appraise student growth. To provide students with good teaching, school communities should foster these qualities among teachers, as well as provide a clear individualized vision of what a curriculum of the heart looks like within their own school context.

While a curriculum of the heart is a new conceptualization, the idea of an embodied, well-balanced, and holistic education is not. Aoki (2005a/1993) presents the notion of an inspired and embodied curriculum in which the body, mind, and soul are connected and supported. Within this type of curriculum, teaching is understood as a mode of being with others and relating with students. By describing curriculum in such terms, Aoki recognized the interconnectedness, emotional, and affective elements of teaching and learning that are not always acknowledged within traditional curriculum views.

A parallel can also be drawn between a curriculum of the heart and the ideas presented within Indigenous education, in which there is a strong belief in lifelong holistic education and the development of the whole child (intellectually, physically, emotionally, and spiritually; Bell, 2011, p. 377; see also Battiste, 2011). Within this historically situated perspective, it is believed that a “child must grow in a balanced way in order to be a healthy person and contribute to his/her life in a healthy way” (Bell, 2011, p. 378). A healthy person is then better able to foster healthy families, communities, and nations. Within Indigenous education, the Medicine Wheel is often used to guide the education process and is visualized as a circle comprised of four equal sections. While the Medicine Wheel is used in various ways, the importance of appreciating the interconnectedness and interrelationships of all things remains a key understanding (Bell). In addition, Indigenous education encourages students to connect with the intergenerational teachings of people and place (Ng-A-Fook, 2011). A curriculum of the heart does not aim to replace these pre-existing ideas, but strives to use these structures as a foundation for future curricular and educational growth. Furthermore, these ideas provide a background for and give legitimacy to this new conceptualization of curriculum through its shared understanding.

While schools have the potential to provide positive and fulfilling lived experiences for students, they too have the potential to accomplish quite the opposite. A standardized and impersonal curriculum with a narrow focus on academic achievement has become disconnected from the goal of developing a well-rounded holistic education, a goal which places the happiness and health of the student at its heart.

Rather than limiting students to the confines of the “skill-and-knowledge factory” (Pinar, 2008/2004, p. 3), it is the task of curriculum theorists, educators, and administrators to challenge the current academic-driven norms through initiating and sustaining discussions on how to best support the holistic needs of students. A curriculum of the heart provides a framework and starting point for such dialogue. Pinar (2012) describes education as an opportunity offered. Through thinking, growing, feeling, and connecting, a curricular space is unveiled. It is within this space that education can provide the opportunity for students to learn and grow in happy, healthy, and holistic ways.



## Notes

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