

Speculative Fiction and Curriculum Theorizing: What could/should schools and classrooms of the future look like?

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The Question at Hand and Our Work

TOM: MORNA MCDERMOTT MCNULTY, my longtime friend and colleague in the field, inspired this special issue as a result of one of her presentations that I attended at *JCT*'s Bergamo Conference in Fall 2023...(Paraphrased): “We already know that schools will look radically different from the schools we know now, P-16. What role will we play in re-imagining them?” So, we invited curriculum theorists to contribute relatively short, accessible, challenging works of speculative fiction to this special of *JCT* focused on the following prompt: What impact can speculative fiction have on the process of currere, and how can the process of currere (specifically the progressive phase, accessing the imaginary) inspire curricularists to creatively speculate possible curriculum futures?

In answering Morna's question, at least initially, I think that we have an opportunity and a responsibility to imagine the future of education, schooling, and classrooms, to argue for something of value happening in them as change imbues our lives, and to be part of the process. One avenue for participation in that project is to engage in imaginative work, to connect to the power of the progressive step of inquiry that occupies a critically important space in the currere method, and write our speculative futures into existence, at least in words if not in actual action. The pieces in this special issue play with the possibilities of imagination to think into existence the potential for schools, classrooms, lives, to reinvigorate our lives and our polity. This issue, which I'm very proud of, constitutes my first and only content contribution to *JCT* as editor during my 6-year run as editor. Serving as editor and President of the Foundation for Curriculum Theory, which sponsors the conference and journal, was one of the best experiences of my professional life; thank you to everyone who made the work possible.

Several of the pieces contained in this special issue were presented by the authors at a session of the 2024 Bergamo Curriculum Conference, attended by a good mix of scholars interested in this type of work, several with their own records of excellent work in this genre of inquiry. In that session, I became very hopeful that this special issue will be just the first of several efforts by the conference and journal to explore the possibilities of this type of work for creating new possibilities for action in our near, very important futures.

As the final pieces in this special issue come together and land in the humming in-boxes of our new managing editors, Vanessa Winn and Jody Googins, during mid-January of 2025, in the midst of climate calamity (LA wildfires), continuing violence in the Middle East surrounding the prospects of peace and a ceasefire in Gaza, and the continuing political upheaval and transformation here in the U.S., I stumbled across a blurb that came across a TV program highlighting the connections between Octavia Butler's (1993) more than 30 year-old novel of speculative fiction *Parable of the Sower* and our current state of affairs. I am sorry I never encountered her book before, but the eerie connections and timing of the action set in the novel should make us even more cognizant of the power of inquiry, of imagination, of possibility, of goodness, of hope. My plan is to read the novel in the coming days, re-read this special issue, all of the pieces again, and reflect on Butler's (1993) message and the messages here-in, and build my own new speculative fiction piece for this year's *JCT* conference in Dayton. I hope you will read both, and more, in the new year as well, and come to our conference session in 2025.

How the Pieces Came Together in This Special Issue: The Authors and Writing

Morna: The perception of time as linear (i.e., the past is 'back there' ... wherever *there* is... and the future is always 'ahead of us') comes from a psycho-percepto-political-spacio/linguistic slight-of-hand. In simpler words, our construction of time is not 'fixed' and as such, time (and place) can be imagined otherwise. This argument is not new or original, nor is it ours alone. Indigenous cultures and decolonial artists, visionaries, writers, and scholars have known this for centuries (see Griffiths, 2004; Fonka & Shizha, 2022). Additionally, speculative fiction has a long and rich history as an artful form of resistance to colonial and oppressive worlds (see Kelly, 2003; Benjamin, 2024; Thomas & Hope, 2001 for a few examples). We do not write, theorize, or imagine our work here in isolation. Our stories ebb and flow from those that have come before us, and those yet to come. We work, to paraphrase the words of Daspit (in this issue), from the "brain froth ... of future memories" where, "ghosts haunt the blood/ink" (p. 70).

Speculative fiction speculates not only on future events but on possibilities for altered pasts and presents. The cornerstone of speculative writing is in the possibility for and from alternatives to what we think of as *present* or *real*. This is not to assume such possibilities are not *not* real. Perhaps speculative alternatives already exist, and it is our perception that demands alteration. In these writing spaces, we find *entanglements* rather than unfolding of experiences. To theorize about the 'future' of curriculum and schooling is to simultaneously reexamine its past and present (Pinar, 2004); all are synchronous phenomena. What do we mean when we say words like *now*? Or, *then*? Or, *next*? Numerous scholars have theorized these questions (see Applebaum, 2019; Weaver, 2019; Gough, 1987; jagodinsky, 2017). Others have used theory to embark on fictional and artful embodiments of creative forms (see Conrad & Weibe, 2021).

This special issue centers contributions around one guiding idea: *All future is fiction*. Or, put another way, "the opposite of fiction isn't fact, it is finitude" (McDermott, 2018, p xxi). By engaging with fictional futures, we are entering the realm of the imaginary. For this special issue

we specifically emphasize the methodology of “ficto-currere” (McDermott, 2018) by which the imaginary becomes a means for layering self and memory with a commitment to social justice and global sustainability. Using memory to develop the progressive phase of *currere* demands a capacity *to speculate*. We are inspired by the words of Conrad and Weibe (2021) who call for us to “envision together other worlds in which education, teaching, and learning are different from how they are now” (p. 6). In this sense, we use *currere* to conjure research findings that “provoke public interest. Harnessing the creative and disruptive capacities of speculative fiction, we write to help shape the not yet of education” (p. 7).

The various contributions in this special issue emerge from one of the “cones of possibilities” (Agostino, 2023, para 5): the probable, the plausible, and the possible. Some of the work here may be crafted to redefine the ‘laws’ of physics and time. Some find friendships in intergalactic or interspecies worlds. In others, poetry and prose are sewn together artistically between lines of the imaginary and the real (however that may be defined), using research-based facts to theorize what might (realistically) happen next. Some haunt us, while still others weave together fantastical dream-states within our familiar worlds. In all, we aimed toward a body of work that bends toward hope. We hope for some/thing. Hope is in the waiting (and, in the writing), and there is nothing but this moment *now*, even as we search for the ‘thing’ or event that is the ‘next.’ Because something is simply nothing but anticipation until your body is full of both light and shadow, particle and wave, in movement. And, no/thing is more important than knowing you can always do something in the *nothing*, that is now.

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