SYMPOSIUM

Beyond the Modern/Postmodern Debate, or How to Live for the Other?

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For whatever reason, we tend to believe that men or women can only be goaded or cajoled, by superior force or superior rhetoric, into peaceful coexistence. (Bauman, 1992, p. xvii)

The following essays originally highlight the growing international interest in moving beyond the modern/postmodern debates within curriculum theory. Such debates have focused on the normalizing function of curriculum and curricular content and knowledge. In moving beyond such debates, each of the papers in this Symposium grounds its discussion in ethical questions as opposed to epistemological ones.

In the debates in education over the last years consequences of the postmodern critique of modernist science have left their mark within the field of curriculum theory and educational research more generally. Discussions on the value of postmodern and modern research paradigms have been so thoroughly questioned that there seems to be little room for moving beyond these debates. The impasse lies largely in the attributed status and relevance of knowledge for education, and research on both sides has been focused on identifying central issues of an epistemological nature. Whether knowledge is seen to lie in a more or less direct relation to truth, or seen to be a social construction, or is viewed as that which needs to be put under erasure, curriculum theory tends mainly to operate within the parameters of how knowledge impacts upon our daily lives in educational settings.

In this collection of essays, the authors take another route beyond such debates by shifting the grounds for educational questions from the
sphere of epistemology to ethical relations. By following the thought of such authors as Emmanuel Levinas (1969), Jacques Derrida (Critchley, 1999), and Zygmunt Bauman (1993) we ask how curriculum might look different when we take ethical relations as the starting point. It is not that modern or postmodern research paradigms do not address ethics in education, but that how we live with others has tended to be addressed in epistemological terms. That is, questions regarding ethics are seen to be about knowing how to live better, either through adopting principles of peaceful coexistence (such as care) or by coming to know others through their own self-perceptions and self-narratives.

In taking a turn toward ethical relations as the point of departure, this collection of essays instead addresses how we might live for others. This shift from living with to living for is built upon an understanding of intersubjectivity as always already being implicated in ethical relations, prior to any conception of the other. Such a "pre-social morality" (Bauman, 1993) re-orientes questions around what constitutes curriculum, teaching, and learning and how these might have value for promoting conditions for peaceful co-existence.

In so doing the focus shifts from that which is already conceptualised and given meaning within different systems of order, such as education/socialisation, justice, gendered identities, and community to an ambiguous space where there are no answers preceding the question: How to live for the other? In taking this question as the first question, the papers do not find a natural end in systems of thought, rather they open up spaces of freedom in which the emerging moral subject is an outcome of one's actual response to an other.

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