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Florida International University
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Doctoral Dissertation Defense

Abstract

“We Need Educational Confession”: A Philosophical Inquiry of Curriculum as Confession

by

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This dissertation theorizes curriculum as confession and attends to questions of justice, selfhood, and the pursuit of truth. An inquiry on confession is atypical among traditional educational dissertations because the practice is normally associated with religious institutions as opposed to schools or higher education. Moreover, confession is something usually associated with guilt or shame, not with traditional educational discourses of learning, teaching, or curriculum. As a result, confession is overlooked within educational discourse.

I argue, however, that confession always occurs because curriculum is the site of subjective educational experience. Taking part in the reconceptualist tradition of the curriculum field, curriculum always happens because we are always already in a pedagogical world, and, therefore, are always teaching and learning. Drawing on curriculum history and continental philosophers like Foucault and Derrida, I argue that confession is an educational practice in instrumental and existential ways. I argue with Foucault that confession is instrumental and extractive and likewise can be the site of resistant responses to that extraction. Utilizing different philosophical and literary figures, I theorize with Derrida that our attempts to conceptualize the world have an irreducible uncertainty and misrepresentation. Moreover, because there is no signification without difference, there is always the threat of exclusion from representation. The question, then, is, how do we tell the truth without violating the other? How does one do justice to the world they experience? This dissertation utilizes a humanities-based approach to imagining and re-conceptualizing curriculum as confession, which I find is ultimately the autobiographical play of formation and transformation.

I intend for the findings of this study to serve as a new way to think about curriculum and being, and will provide new modes of reflection and imagination for teachers and researchers. What is needed, I argue, is fewer ways to reduce the world to simply measurements and more ways to open up the pedagogical world we already inhabit with the hope that we press toward a world otherwise.

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Place: online, via Zoom

Department: Teaching and Learning

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