# (Un)changing English - Past, Present, Future?

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Where are we now? Where have we come from? Where are we going? These are questions arguably fundamental to English teaching, as a distinctive curriculum practice and a longstanding feature of schooling. They might seem removed from the immediate hurly-burly of English teachers' work, the all-too-vivid and often visceral existential drama of everyday classroom life. But such considerations are relevant and vital nonetheless, I suggest, and indeed central if we are truly to understand what English teachers *do* and what they *are*, within the complex field of contemporary social and educational reality. That such questions are rarely asked or at least followed through — except perhaps in a forum such as this — is ample testimony to the fact that, like education more generally, English teaching is a *practice*, an engaged worldly practice — a form of praxis. There is little time or opportunity, and perhaps increasingly so, to step away and outside, to become as it were mere spectators, onlookers, or simply subjects of vision. Now, however, in this first decade of the twenty-first century, it is especially important for those of us implicated in the field, in our varying ways, to keep asking questions such as these, and to seek to probe thus into our past, our present *and* our future.

Arguments are increasingly being marshalled for the value and even the necessity of historical awareness and more broadly historical imagination in and for curriculum inquiry and praxis, particularly in relation to English teaching (Morgan, 1990, 1995; Green and Beavis, 1996; Green, 1995, 1998; Doecke, 2001; Hunter, 1996). Of specific interest in this regard has been concern expressed about the putative 'newness' of things in English today, and indeed in education and schooling more generally. Directly related to this growing interest and concern is an anxiety about the fate and fortunes of English teaching, as just one — albeit, arguably, central — aspect of the project of modernist schooling. The question inevitably arises: Are we now witness to the end of English as we have known and lived it, in our own careers as well as that larger trajectory of the twentieth century? And then, of course: What comes *after* English? What are the successor-projects waiting, somewhat impatiently, in the wings? I am thinking here about a mounting preoccupation over the past ten years or so with notions of 'new kids', 'new times', 'new technologies', 'new literacies', 'new …' — something in which I must confess to being complicit, myself. Such rhetoric has obviously been exasperating for some of our colleagues, in and out of schools and classrooms.

What intrigues me, however, is that debates such as these proceed seemingly oblivious to the strikingly similar rhetoric of the so-called 'New English', arguably the major contemporary manifestation of the discourse of English teaching, and clearly an enduring feature of its professional self-understanding. This 'New English' is commonly associated with the 'inaugurating' moment of the famous Dartmouth conference in 1966, and viewed accordingly as a distinguishing feature of the field in the late twentieth century. Moreover, these are all profoundly *historical* claims, registering particular views and versions of history, and also expressing quite particular interests and partialities. They are also caught up in various ways with biographies, with 'life-histories'

— quite understandably so. And that is why taking informed account of history is important, in its theory as well as its practice. At the very least, as noted elsewhere, such awareness makes for "greater humility and sensitivity on the part of educational reform movements or initiatives" (Green and Beavis, 1996: 4).

Half a century earlier, writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, the distinguished educational scholar John Adams wrote of the predilection to labelling things as 'new' as more than simply a manifestation of what might be called 'Americanism', as 'Progress'. As he observed, it was something evident even in Britain:

> On this side [of the Atlantic] we have always had the New Art: lately we have added the New Theology, the New Nationalism, the New Psychology - and now we have the New Education, with its variant the New Teaching, not to speak of the *New Children* (Adams, 1922: 1).

He goes on to present an intriguing and indeed salutary discussion of what might be called the rhetoric of the New, observing for instance that "[i]t seems inherent in human beings to regard their own period as one of notable change". Moreover: "We are continually telling each other that this is a critical time, that we are at the parting of the ways, that vital issues lie in our hands a the present moment" (Adams, 1922: 2). In a later publication, explicitly entitled "The New Teaching", he elaborates on this theme, in the context of introducing a collection of accounts of different school-subjects (Adams, 1927a). Included among these, as would be expected, is English — an account which, in fact, he authored himself (Adams, 1927b). We need to recall, too, that these are relatively early days in the formal history of English as a distinctive school-subject, which is usually dated back only to the cusp of the century (Ball, 1985), with 1921 also marking the 'apogee' release of the Newbolt Report.

So what did Adams have to say about the 'new' English? To begin with, he is emphatic that English is of particular and indeed central importance in the school curriculum: "From the nature of the case, English inevitably takes rank as one of the most, if not the most important, of all the school subjects" (Adams, 1927b: 39). Consistent with his account(s) of the New Teaching is a firm emphasis on issues of interest, activity and experience, on student engagement, and (crucially) on pedagogy as a *relation*. Moreover, this is understood as a relationship of a particular kind, a complex interaction and exchange marked by a somewhat paradoxical reciprocity. As he writes apropos the New Teaching: "It must be recognised that in the ultimate resort a subject must be approached from the standpoint of the pupil, rather than of the teacher" (Adams, 1927a: 11). Yet the teacher's role, and indeed the teaching *presence*, is crucial nonetheless. The focus of language lessons is to shift away from 'grammar' to 'usage', with a strong emphasis on 'talk' and 'writing', on students having things to say in their composition work and appreciating and understanding what they read. Learning and usage are to be 'purposeful', stressing 'matter' rather than 'form'. Accordingly:

> In the school curriculum the teaching of English has two main functions: (i) to prepare pupils to use the language as a means of ordinary communication - in this aspect English is to be treated as a tool; (ii) to provide a body of culture material - in this aspect English is cultivated more or less for its own sake, and the emphasis is laid on content: English literature stands out prominently here (Adams, 1927b: 47).

This is entirely familiar territory: language and literature, culture and utility. Later, the moral project of English teaching comes to the fore, along with the politics of taste and discrimination, specifically with regard to literature teaching. "[T]he radical difference between the old teaching and the new", he writes, "is that we have passed from books about books to the books themselves" (Adams, 1927b: 65) — from 'commentary' to 'text', as it were. And yet, which texts? "The new teaching recognises the serious danger of hampering the individuality of the pupil by restricting his reading in English Literature, and yet cannot reconcile itself to the complete neglect of certain fields and periods" (Adams, 1927b: 69). And then there is the problem of the 'prurient' and the 'penny dreadful': what is worth reading, and what gets selected within curriculum. The tutelary complex emerges, too, with reference made to certain types of literature that are permanently unsuitable for the school age, for the reason that they demand an experience of life that is for ever impossible at that age" (Adams, 1927b: 71-72). The literary and the governmental comes together in exemplary fashion, in presenting "the objects of literary studies as part of education" as

> (i) the formation of a personality fitted for civilized life; (ii) the provision of a permanent source of pure and unalienable pleasure; and (iii) the immediate pleasure of the student in the process of education (Adams, 1927b: 72).

That this was an entirely reasonable and recognisable stance regarding English teaching in the early decades of the twentieth century in Australia as elsewhere in the Anglophone world, can be readily discerned in manuals such as those of James Elijah and Percy Cole, in Teachers College reading lists and *Gazette* references across the country, as well as English syllabus documents.

Peter Board, in his pioneering capacity as Director of Education, was a driving influence in the 1905 Primary Syllabus in NSW, at an auspicious moment in the formation of Australian public schooling, post-Federation (Green and Reid, 2002). Significantly, he saw English as the very 'cornerstone' of the school curriculum. For him, this central focus was by no means simply a matter of utility but, rather, entailed seeing English as first and foremost a 'culture subject' *par excellence*, linked decisively to the inculcation of active citizenship and the project of nation-building (Board, 1932). Writing about the same time as John Adams in this regard, George Mackaness wrote eloquently of "the question of reformed methods in the teaching of English", drawing on his own classroom experience and his methods teaching at Sydney Teachers College, with a keen awareness

of educational scholarship in Britain and the United States. The figure of the English teacher, as an exemplary personage, an eminently emulable subject, looms large in his account. His title itself is indicative of this: his book is called 'Inspirational Teaching'. As he writes: "After many years of experimentation …, I have come to one definite conclusion that the foundation of all modern methods of teaching, not only of the mother tongue, but of all school subjects, must be laid upon the basis of inspiration, coupled with a purposed development of the subconscious or unconscious intellectual self of each and every pupil…" (Mackaness, 1928: 99). Referring this time specifically to English, he urges enthusiasm for the subject on the part of teachers: "how can your pupils be expected to become absorbed in the finest of modern school studies if you are bored by it yourself?" (Mackaness, 1928: 14). It is clear that we are in the realm of pedagogic *contagion* here: the now entirely familiar exhortation to teachers of English to be 'models', to embody the subject — and always at risk, accordingly, of 'martyrdom' (Mathieson, 1975; Morgan, 1990: 231; cf Green, 1998). "Teachers teach what they are themselves at the core" (Boomer, 1988) — the very *self* of the English teacher as a critical resource for classroom work and curriculum practice.

Yet I want to suggest that there is always a telling hesitancy, a persistent tension, even an ambivalence in such confident assertions of curriculum identity and subject agency. There is accordingly considerable profit, I think, in self-consciously, deliberately problematising the 'subject', as it were. By this I mean making strategically strange what seems so familiar, even natural and inevitable, monolithic: the (school-)subject itself, English as a distinctive curriculum formation and a key site for the interplay between textual practice and social identity. How might this be done? In turning my attention now to the outline of a particular framework for curriculum-historical thinking, I shall try to provide some perspective on what is in fact an extremely complex and challenging question.

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Thinking historically about English teaching is increasingly a matter of exhortation and advocacy in the field. However, actually doing it is easier said than done, and indeed it is an activity fraught with difficulty. It means not just looking back, learning the lessons of the past, and hence "putting our past to work…" (Green, Cormack and Reid, 2000) - critical and crucial as that certainly is. As well, it means re-assessing our present, as an always-already problematic form of presence, and it also means thinking about and speculating on the future, as a space of difference and danger, promise and (im)possibility. Drawing from poststucturalist theory and philosophy, on the one hand, and contemporary curriculum inquiry, on the other, I have been working for some time now with a framework that I think provides a useful resource in this regard. Hence I offer this formulation as a contribution to that end, as what might be described as at once a 'table of invention' and a 'grid of specification', a heuristic map, enabling and informing the generation of curriculum statements and thus guiding curriculum research as well as teachers' work.

*Fig 1.*

| | past(s) | present(s) | futures(s) |
|---|---|---|---|
| discourses | | | |
| programmes | | | |
| effects | | | |

As you can see, it brings together 'discourses', 'programmes' and 'effects', along one axis, and a particular temporal movement along the other axis, encompassing 'pasts', 'presents' *and* 'futures'. I have been working with this diagram with my colleagues and students for some time now, and it has proved to be useful as a reference-point for our work. Let me take this opportunity to provide some commentary on it.

Firstly, there is a deliberate emphasis on plurality and difference here — on the notion, for instance, that we should be cautious in assigning a simple identity even to the 'present', the 'now'. There can be no thinking, simplistically or even pragmatically, that 'we' occupy and enact the same curriculum reality, a common ontology. 'English' means very different things to different people, or different constituencies. Hence there is much debate, even now, about versions of English… The same point applies to thinking about the past *and* the future.

With regard to English teaching's future, work in the area of what's called 'curriculum futures' is obviously pertinent. Noel Gough (1989) for instance suggests attending to the full array of 'possible', 'probable' and 'preferred' futures. In similar fashion, we need to pluralise the past, to accept and understand that in fact there may well be *multiple* pasts to consider and contend with — competing or contested visions and versions, conflicting as well as congruent stories. The point is we cannot assume a simple identity, a single linear history. Rather, there are always 'past*s*', 'present*s*', 'future*s*' to consider, and to account for. What might this mean for thinking productively about English teaching?

In similar fashion, it should be noted that the reference here is to a range or perhaps a set of what I am calling 'discourse*s*', 'programme*s*' and 'effect*s*'. In using these terms, I am building on the work of Michel Foucault and others, with the aim of evoking a complex social field. Importantly, this proposes a particular relationship between the historical and the discursive — between *history* and *discourse* — and hence between historical inquiry and discourse analysis. That is obviously a somewhat controversial position to adopt, and it needs to be said that its associated conceptual and methodological dilemmas and challenges are still in the course of being worked through (Cormack and Green, 2000; Popkewitz et al, 2002).

Further, I want to stress the necessary non-correspondence of the relations between 'discourses', 'programmes' and 'effects'. This forestalls — hopefully — any attempt to read one off the other, or to assume that things can ever work out exactly as planned or desired! History is simply too complicated, too messy for that. And this means, historiographically, working with a sufficiently complex view of narrative and textuality

— a (re)confirmation, surely, of the potentially close links between History and English, as curriculum practices.

How is this tri-stratal view of historical practice to be understood? Here I am drawing on Foucaultian scholars Barry Smart (1983) and Colin Gordon (1980). "Three distinct orders of historical events have been differentiated by Foucault, namely discourses, social and institutional practices, and finally effects which materialise within the social field" (Smart, 1983; 93). That is, in Gordon's (1980: 246) terms, "a basic distinction" is posited "between three such general orders of events: that of certain forms of explicit, rational, reflected *discourse*; that of certain non-discursive social and institutional *practices*; and that of certain *effects* produced within the social field". Moreover:

> These three orders do not of course represent watertight ontological compartments; the same events can be considered in turn under each of them. The point is to clarify certain of the ways in which they intersect and interact (Gordon, 1980: 246).

Something of the complexity of historical practice can be discerned here, along with a sharp emphasis on (dis)continuity, interruption and uneven development. Importantly this calls for careful attention to the local specificity of historical circumstance, without moving too quickly to general statement, and due account of the potential significance of the contingent and the accidental. The thesis of *non*-correspondence is crucial here, not simply because it allows for the 'failure' of social planning — the perhaps inevitable discrepancy between discourse and action — but also, further along the line, as Gordon (1980: 248) writes:

> just because some non-realised programmes tend to drop from the official record, it becomes all the more important and fascinating to investigate what may have been their mode of their real but unprogrammed effects.

So what we have, to this point, is a formulation of the curriculum-historical field as an dynamic ensemble of discourse, programmes and effects. What does this involve? How is it to be understood? To begin with, what I am suggesting here is a differentiated view of the field, or rather, a disaggregated concept of history-as-discourse. The aim in doing so is to acknowledge that it is not very helpful simply to name everything as 'discourse', as discursive (let alone as 'text'…). A proper sense of *materiality* is crucial — indeed, of wor(l)diness. In this regard, discursive practice needs to be understood as 'historical-materialist' through and through, woven into the very texture of the world as we come to know it. The argument I am developing here therefore seeks to understand English teaching historically, as a specific curriculum formation of knowledge, power, discourse and identity.

For my purposes in this context, then, I want to restrict the notion of *discourse* to the complex of social ideas and storylines circulating in a society at any given moment.

What then are the discourses (in this more focused, delimited sense) shaping and informing (i.e. having effects on) English teaching? Located as we are in the early years of the twenty-first century, we need to bear in mind that subject English *per se* is little more than a century-old. The general consensus in the scholarly literature is that it formally emerged as a distinctive school-curriculum identity only in the first decade of the twentieth century, certainly in Australia and England, though perhaps a little earlier in North America (Ball, 1985). That means due consideration must be made of the social, economic, cultural and technological dynamics of the period in question. In Australia, it was a time of profound change, with an associated sense of hope and possibility. A new nation had emerged on the world scene, and also a new moment in British imperial history. For a time at least, it seemed as if anything and everything was possible.

This was as much the case in education as in any other sphere of social life. "The twentieth century … began with something of an educational awakening", as Turney (1983: 1) writes. It was indeed the high watermark of the so-called 'New Education', in Australia as elsewhere (Selleck, 1968), a broad educational reform movement, very much of its time, that was in fact relatively short-lived in itself, but whose discourses, programmes and effects are arguably still to be observed, across the Western educational world. Turney (1983: 1) provides a useful and illustrative gloss:

> [T]he New Education embraced such diverse aspects as child study, manual training, experimental education, learning-by-doing, self-activity and freedom, moral education, physical education, nature study and agricultural pursuits, Herbartianism, kindergarten work, Pestalozzian pedagogy, and Montessorian approaches. *A vital underlying theme was a movement towards teaching and learning concerned essentially with the child, its nature, and all-round development* [my added emphasis].

Although curiously little recognised or acknowledged, there is a decided link here with Romanticism, and also with Progressivism, as perhaps the two most important discursive fields informing and shaping English teaching (Reid, 2001; Mayher, 1990; Willinsky, 1987). Indeed it is important neither to overlook nor underestimate the historical significance of the interplay of Romanticism and Progressivism in and for English teaching (Green and Beavis, 1996: 8-9).

This points to the inter-animation of 'art' and 'science' in the curriculum-historical work of English teachers. Mathiesson (1975) among others has noted the importance of nineteenth-century debates regarding the shaping influence of scientific ideology in culture and society — the scientific 'spirit'. Seemingly counterposed to this was *literary ideology* - 'Literature', as a distinctive social concept with its associated cultural technologies. Something still to be adequately investigated, in fact, is the emergence of English and Education as (tertiary') fields of study and forms of praxis, and the relationship between these. Just as important *and* useful, though, would be to explore the more mundane, governmental aspects of popular-public education, the starting point in this regard being the installation and consolidation of a State-sponsored system of

elementary ('primary') schooling. At this point, the figure of the Child becomes a complex icon of the relationship between art and science, culture and pedagogy. Moreover, this figure is arguably linked very crucially to the dominant discursive ensemble of Literature. English teaching is clearly heavily invested in this nexus.

Understanding English teaching as a distinctive historical field of discourses, programmes and effects, then, requires taking into account the manner in which the idea of Literature intersects with, and infuses, the project of the New Education. To do that properly would necessitate a fuller account of the curriculum-historical significance of Matthew Arnold — at once Inspector and Poet — than is possible here. The point to focus on here is that English teaching, 'literature' and the New Education need to be thought together, historically, as a system of interrelated responses to an emergent field of social problems, and as such, symptomatic of a distinctive new order of (urban-industrial) existence. Moreover, this must be understood as a *positive*, *productive* development — and crucially implicated in the construction of, at once, new circumstances and new forms of subjectivity. It is in this sense that "English" can indeed appropriately be described as "a technology which produces a certain kind of person", and moreover "not so much an identifiable field of study" as

> a range of practices which contribute to the formation of a particular kind of person that societies have found they need, *and which English is able to help produce* (Peel, Patterson and Gerlach, 2000: 18).

It is important, here, to emphasise that what is *not* being evoked in such formulations, let alone endorsed, is what some perceive as a kind of 'discourse determinism' — that human beings are simply 'objects' of discursive practices and technologies. What must always be taken into account is that whatever social plans and designs are set in play, historically, they are never realised as desired, in their immaculate, imaginary form. Rather, there is always "an ineluctable discrepancy between discourse and actuality" (Gordon, 1980: 250) — 'room to move', albeit always within limits. Hence, we must not lose sight of the significance of the realm of 'effects', as a space of indeterminacy, of freedom, while bearing in mind, always, the inevitability and the productivity of constraint: "Our world does not follow a programme, but we live in a world of programmes" (Gordon, 1980: 245).

How then to draw upon this 'postmodern' understanding of history, as a dynamic social field of forces and significations, chronologies and complexities, to grasp something of the character and project of English teaching — past, present *and* future?

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Something that has arguably been an enduring feature of English teaching, certainly since its formal inception in the early twentieth century, is its investment in a certain formulation of the *self*, or as it might better be described the 'self-subject'. This is often

understood as a form of liberal humanism, linked in various ways to Enlightenment notions of agency and rationality and also, more recently, to social-programmatic forms of the self-possessing individual (Rose, 1998). Hence, as various commentators have asserted, "subject English has always been a project predicated on individualism" (Peel, Paterson and Gerlach, 2001: 30; see also Griffith, 1993). Bob Morgan some time ago now called for "another type of history of the 'subject' altogether than the traditional ones" — that is, one focussed on the production of subjectivity:

> a history of the forms of subjectivity projected by English studies as a site where particular discourses and practical routines are enacted, other silenced, still other capacities and connections never envisioned or fostered at all.

From such a perspective, as he wrote, "English is a training in how to say 'I', and the establishment of the social horizons within which this utterance takes place" (Morgan, 1990: 203). I want to link this to the position adopted by James Moffett — widely acknowledged as one of the principal architects of the so-called New English, and certainly a central figure in late-twentieth century developments and debates in English teaching. It needs to be borne in mind here that what I am arguing for in this essay is what has been called a 'history of the present', and that it can also be argued that much current understandings of English teaching are formed, perhaps understandably, in a distinctively post-'Dartmouth' image. I suspect that this is, in part, what is behind what Ian Reid [this volume] describes as "the strange persistence of growth pedagogy" in the history of English teaching. It is also indicative, I suggest, of the problematic *practice* of history that pervades much recent debate.

For Moffett, the 'universe of discourse' is to be understood in terms of what he presented as two intersecting axes, one of *information*, the other of *communication*. This he formulated as a set of relationships between speakers and their audience(s) or addressee(s), on the one hand, and on the other, between speakers and their topic(s) or subject-matter. That verbal-discursive space, or "trinity of discourse" as he expressed it, comprises a network of "first, second and third persons" (Moffett, 1981: 146). While he thereby appears to give due emphasis to the referential function of language, it is clear that, for him, the rhetorical, interpersonal relations of the 'I' and the 'you' have ontological priority over the third term, rendered rather tellingly as an ‘I-it' relation. I have subsequently sought to build upon, and play with, Moffett's framework ('I, you and it'), re-phrasing this in terms of 'I, you, and IT', thus engaging notions of technocultural complexity and change and indeed of the (technological) unconscious (Green, 2001). The point I want to make here is, that, firstly, Moffett's work in this regard needs to be understood as a particular *programme* for realising the (authorial) self as an authoritative, organising focus, and secondly, that this constitutes a distinctive form of what Foucault posited as 'technologies of the self', usefully glossed as "'self-steering mechanisms', or the ways in which individuals experience, understand, judge, and conduct themselves" (Rose, 1998: 29), thus actively (re)forming their selves as social beings of a certain kind. As such, it has been an enormously productive exercise in discursive practice and textual power, albeit with limits and constraints built into it. What I have sought to do is to

appropriate and re-articulate it within a 'postmodern' frame, in the course of which I propose that we entertain the possibility of working somewhat against the grain of current-traditional English teaching, encouraging more fluid, dispersed, flexible practices of self and textuality. In this way, in transforming 'composing' into 'compos(IT)ing', new possibilities emerge for English teaching as a rhetorical practice, characterised by changing regimes of both ethics and aesthetics (Green, 2001).

The point I want to stress, here, in drawing to my conclusion, is two-fold. Firstly, there is indeed a degree of play here, a certain autonomy and unpredictability in the realm of *effects*. As well as never working out exactly as planned or desired, programmes in the historical record are always available for re-appropriation and re-writing. The example I have presented here and elsewhere is illustrative, I hope, of the resources available to us in some of the rich albeit always ambivalent legacies of 'process' and 'growth' pedagogy, *as well as their antecedents*. It is especially important to take account of the significance of the project of the New Education in the curriculum history of English teaching and the (dis)continuities evident in the (un)changing nature of English teachers' work. The early twentieth century's "twin objectives of promoting individuality and providing greater freedom" (Turney, 1983: 2) in Australian educational reform strikes a note strangely familiar. To what extent does this remain central to the mission of English teaching, in a complexly global, post-national context of new forms of governance and exchange, work and learning? What new forms of the self and community are emerging, and how might this relate to new forms of literacy and textuality? As Richard Andrews has observed recently, in drawing attention to changing landscapes of communication and representation, and contemplating some of the implications and opportunities for English teaching:

> There is much to argue for in relation to the roles of the visual and ICT in relation to English teaching — indeed, a new conception of the curriculum field, based on multimedia, may well subsume what we have taken to be 'English' (i.e. a text-based discipline) over the past eighty years (Andrews, 2001: 99).

But are we even able to think of English teaching outside of the 'text' paradigm — that is, as other than a text-based discipline? Aren't we still caught up in re-assessing the role and significance of 'literature', or art-work, at the same time as seeking to engage new media and new technocultural practices? Indeed, does such speculation and such challenges entail at least contemplating a future *without* English teaching — *after* English?

My second point is this: However we go about (re)thinking what we do and what we are, as English teachers in the present, it is important that we develop a rich and complex view of history, of *our* history as well as that of the larger social context, locally, nationally and globally. And that means being open to difference as well as identity. How then to think about the New? It is best considered perhaps as an *attitude,* a matter of both commemoration and renewal. Its evocation thus compels attention to the legacies

and resources of the past even as we move inexorably into the future, endlessly re-inventing ourselves, and always fully engaged in the interplay of the Wor(l)d and the curriculum-historical imagination.

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