

Part V

Interlude Five. Dear David: An Open Letter to a Science Educator

I normally do not write letters because we are no longer a letter writing culture. This is one of the reasons I am writing you to recognize your contribution to science studies and the impact your book, *Procedures of Power and Curriculum Change: Foucault and the Quest for Possibilities in Science Education*, has had. I do not think the field of curriculum studies recognizes the importance of your work and along with Noel and Annette Gough you were an early advocate for the incorporation of science studies into curriculum studies discourses. Not enough people have heard your voice. This is a major problem in our field. Too many are beholden to a star system thereby creating a mono-vocal culture. Curriculum Studies is not the only field that has succumbed to this celestial system, literature has too. The problem with a star system is not that stars exist, but that the star gazers only hear a few voices and drown out other possible voices. I am not a star gazer, but I am grateful for those who arrived before me and opened up intellectual avenues to explore.

In the final chapter of this book I could have selected any number of intellectuals to draw upon from philosophy when discussing science. I could have selected Heidegger who famously rejected the modernist worship of science and reminded his readers that one could not be a good scientist and not be a philosopher. Philosophy was the key to understand science, and therefore more important. I could have selected a more contemporary thinker like Bernard Stiegler whose work explores the ways in which through technology and science life is becoming more monocultural and mechanized. Stiegler does not think technology and science innately leads to an algorithmic reaction to experiences but the way in which technology and science are utilized and developed does. I also could have focused on Michel Serres work. Unlike Heidegger and Stiegler here is a scientist who turns to philosophy because science has become too dangerous to be left alone. In his interview with Bruna Latour, another scholar I could have focused on, Serres (1995, 15) revealed that which underlined his thinking about philosophy and science, and why science cannot be left to the scientists: "Since the atomic bomb, it had become urgent to rethink scientific optimism. I ask my readers to hear the explosion of this problem in every page of my books. Hiroshima remains the sole object of my philosophy." Serres' questioning of scientific optimism remind you of someone

else? You too have challenged this optimism without abandoning science. For creating this path I thank you.

All three of these thinkers deserve more attention in matters of science than curriculum scholars are giving. Michel Foucault is one philosopher I could not devote this last chapter to because you already did it. It is not that only one person can write about an important thinker as Foucault nor is it because there is only one possible interpretation to create around Foucault's work and you cornered that market. If this were the case then clearly I have not been reading my Foucault, Derrida, or Nietzsche close enough. The reason I cannot focus on Foucault is I share your reading of his work as it relates to science. You have created an important work, something for curriculum scholars to admire.

Your call to adopt a science and technology studies (STS) approach to science education in order to reform science education is admirable. You are correct I believe when you wrote that adopting an STS approach to learning science was "a chance to debate and consider the role of science and technology in the society they [students] will form and presently influence." (Blades 1997, 36) Science is too important to leave to the scientists and non-scientists in a democracy need to be involved in science research agendas and policies. STS, as you say, science studies, as I say, is an avenue to connect non-science people to the matters of science. This does not mean all people should be in a scientific laboratory one time or another in their lifetimes or they should be involved in every scientific debate that emerges in regards to important questions as to what research should be funded, what policies should be created regarding a scientific discovery, or how scientific creations should be utilized in society. They should however be aware of scientific developments and their impact on human and non-human lives. They should be aware as well of the historical and philosophical meanings of science and how these histories and philosophies impact the lives of billions of people today and tomorrow. Of course, if they so choose they should also have, as a citizen of a democracy, the right to be involved in any scientific matter they deem important. This right does require a responsibility. If an individual thinks they need to be involved in a debate over a scientific development or policy decision, then they must take the responsibility to educate themselves. This is where your work would serve everyone well. It would be in public education science classes where individuals would learn what the scientific debates and policy implications are regarding these debates.

Although you focus on the work of Foucault you are very much a Nietzschean dancer. You are not a sober thinker Nietzsche warned us about. You revel in the beauty and creativity of science. Need I remind you of what you wrote in 1997? It is rhetorical question so of course I do. When reflecting on your experiences of implementing a new science curriculum in Alberta you recognized that curriculum reform and "research," real reform not neoliberal ideological changes in public education, "is a messy, personal business. Clear steps will not be obvious and no product forthcoming. I can not tell someone how to begin or proceed, neither do I recommend anyone follow in the footsteps I have taken, even if I could retrace them with perfect clarity." (Blades 1997, 97-98) Yes! Recipes, steps, protocols, methods kill the spirit of inquiry and cover up the evidence of human endeavor, scientific or

not. Do we as educators wish to be accessories to the crime of rewriting the past, covering our chaotic tracks, and pretending we knew everything beforehand? Or do we wish to embark on a quest to create something worthwhile and meaningful? If we choose the latter as you have, then we have to accept what you have: there are no shortcuts, bullet points, or crib notes. There is only the hard work of creativity.

It is not an accident that I just used the word quest because this is what you did in your book. When I re-read your work I kept on saying to myself David's quest is Zarathustrian. He is Zarathustra descending from the mountain looking for his people; the new people who would transcend their humanness and think differently. In your quest you came upon Foucault. No surprise to me that your paths would cross. You "recognized him from a picture on one of his books. No one else in your party paid any attention to him and simply walked by, but I knew from his writings that this scholar had spent time in the Lonely Mountains at the edge of the Kingdom." (Blades 1997, 133) Foucault was Zarathustrian as well. He did spend time in solitude on his own mountain, trying to descend it numerous times to help other people realize their predicaments in life. Did he fail like Zarathustra and return to his mountain lair where he rather spend eternity alone than with people who were unwilling to claim their will to power? Are you? I am not sure. Foucault can no longer answer such queries and only you can answer my question. I do know that your use of allegory was an effective rhetorical move to not only argue for the need for science reform and curriculum debate, but you showed what such a journey can mean to an individual and society if science matters are studied carefully. Thank you for sharing your journey and creating a path. It is a path I started on and then created my own. Yours is why I decided to focus on Nietzsche in this last chapter of my book and why I decided to do it in the form of aphorisms.

References

- Blades, D. (1997). *Procedures of power & curriculum change: Foucault and the quest for possibilities in science education*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers.
- Serres, M with Latour, B. (1995). *Conversations on science, culture, and time*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.