PROGRAMMING CHILDREN'S CURRICULUM EXPERIENCE?

XUYANG QIAN

In January 2015, before I gave a lecture to over 100 honored "leading teachers" of all subjects in Jiaxing City, China, the dean of the Education Institution for in-service teachers' training in that city gave a brief opening talk. When it came to the significances of applying technology in teaching, he solemnly claimed two requirements: 1) all the teachers should be able to program; 2) all the teachers should be able to move curriculum online. I heard sighs and buzzes around the lecture hall.

Being able to move curriculum online has become a basic requirement for teachers in China, especially with the launch of the massive national project-- "*National Project of Improving School Teachers' ICT Competence* (Ministry of Education, October 2013)", which involves over 10 million school (including kindergarten) teachers national-wide, and aims at "comprehensively improving" school teachers' information technology application through training program.

Despite the resistance towards this compulsory performance-assessment-related training program (mainly online courses developed by technology companies, or university institutions, supplemented by face-to-face lectures), and concerns regarding technology adoption and its possible dehumanizing or trivializing effects on the learning process etc., this national project is now in full swing all over China. Resistance is futile (Casper, 1995, p. 183), as usual. Historically, teachers who raise concerns towards negative influences of technology have been labeled as "suffering from techno-pathology" (Ferneding, 2004, p.187). Today, we heard technology enthusiasts like Weaver (2004, p.31) declares that curriculum theorists and educators "are not prepared to educate the post-human generation". Weaver writes (2004, p.31), "In a post-human generation classroom, the only empty vessel is the teacher who is not wired and the curriculum theorists who still envision technology as a deterrent to learning and creativity."

As history has repeatedly demonstrates, the mere availability of a technology is no guarantee that it will be taken up, which means that people will only adopt a technology if it resonates with a latent desire. (Wertheim, 1999, p.29) The sheer scale of interest in technologized learning and the requirement of teachers becoming programmers suggest there are intense desires at work. It is important to recognize the genuinely desires behind, and to understand what are the factors that give rise to them.

Desire of shifting pedagogical space

When curricula are moved online, the pedagogical space where teachers and students used to dwell in is shifted, from "ground"—classrooms, libraries, museums, outdoor, to cyberspace. The flooding of curriculum into the cyberspace shows that, current and future pedagogical space is accelerating technologized, which means that

teachers and students are increasingly forced to spend time in cyberspace—whether they want to or not.

Since cyberspace is conceived as an open space, free from all circumstance constraints, educational policy makers have taken up moving curriculum into cyberspace as leading education into an idealized educational realm, that is "above" and "beyond" the problems of a troubled material world, just like the Heavenly City of the New Jerusalem means to faithful Christian. This is called as "a quasi-religious dreaming"—"cyber religious dreaming" by Wertheim (1999, p.22). Some enthusiasts suggest that cyberspace is destined to become the very font of knowledge, Wertheim adds. (1999, p.28)

While cyberspace does offer a potential metaphor for open pedagogical space, it inevitably takes us into the dilemma, not limited but at least including the status of body, the foundation of encountering, experiencing, and subjectivity becoming.

Desire of replacing bodily encountering

Encountering otherness is an acquired way of constructing experience, Jay (2005, p.7) reminds us. According to Chinese education tradition, it is "teacher's Dao (*Shi Dao*)", teacher's humanity and embodied practice that nurtures the students; it is the encountering of teachers and students that helps the students' character building and self-realization.

What happens, however, to such essential encountering, while teachers become programmers, machine operators, or online "curriculum" product providers? Is there any substitutive way of encountering? As we know, some of the virtual schools have claimed that they are "adding face-to-face experiences to the curriculum to satisfy concerns about potential isolation in the online world", since they believe "the ubiquitous use of tools such as Skype, a free Web-based videoconferencing service, and webcams let students see their peers and their teachers, even in cyberspace" (Davis, 2011, p. S8). Can social-networking tools using in online classes actually incorporate face-to-face interaction, and "foster a new ability to promote socialization among cyber students"? (Davis, 2011, p. S8)

In their article "More Than Just a Pretty Face: Affordance of Embodiment", Cassell and his team (2000, p.52) assess the value of human presence: "The qualitative difference in these situations is not just that we enjoy looking at humans more than at computer screens but also that the human body enables the use of certain communication protocols in face-to-face conversation which provide for a more rich and robust channel of communication than is afforded by any other medium available today". This reminds us that "embodied" experience experience is more than just staring at the faces on the screen through social-networking tools.

In fact, experience as lived is more stubborn, often rubbing up against, even entering within, one's body, Pinar (2014) notes. This echoes with Chinese body thinking. Conceived as self in Chinese thinking, body is embedded in a dynamic and ongoing

process of interacting with other bodies/selves. During this course of encountering other bodies/selves, "the self transforms itself, like a flowing stream, rather than a static structure". (Tu, 1999, p.29) This "self-transformation in the process of encountering the other entails a process of humanization", Tu (1999, p.29) argues. Such bodily encountering is not predictable. It cannot be coded, programmed, or planned out, as using social-networking tools in online classes.

Desire of programming curriculum experience

In Chinese body thinking, learning is the ongoing process where our bodies become aesthetic expressions of ourselves (Tu, 1999, p.33), through all kinds of embodied praxis, such as "ti zhi" (bodily knowing), "ti wei" (bodily appreciating), "ti yan" (bodily experiencing), "ti wu" (bodily understanding), "ti cha" (bodily observing), "ti xu" (bodily sympathizing), "ti zheng" (bodily realizing/proving). Each of the embodied praxis plays a critical role in intellectual inquiry, as well as non-intellectual experience that provide us opportunity for dynamic subjectivity construction. Embodied curriculum experience here is subjective, lived, practical, unanticipated, and even risky.

With the unquestioned providing of technologized learning--online curriculum, micro-courses, simulated science experiment, what is at issue is what constitutes and characters such children's curriculum experience. Paradoxically, when students' lived and embodied curriculum experience is technologized to virtual and simulated experience, there is little chance of experience that is unanticipated (see Pinar, 2014).

Take, for instance, the DISlab (Digital Information System laboratory), which is very popular in current Chinese Science classrooms. Instead of being open to "trial, proof, or experiment", which is the Latin meaning of the word "experience" contains (Jay, 2005, p. 10), simulated experiment confines students to a more restrictive, well planned and controlled experiment environment. In so doing, it ensures students get some sense of the science phenomenon in a "safe", "authentic", "efficient" and "economic" way. While the fashion devices and simulations easily capture students' attention, such experience is by no mean an ongoing exciting adventure. It is like "a ride on roller coaster in the Disneyland", a thrill but not really risky, as Liu (2016) describes technologized learning. The significant opportunities of risking spirit nurturing, dealing with unexpected science outcomes, and making scientific judgment are absent.

As Hubert Hermans and his colleagues (1993, p.210) state, "In order to become dialogical, personal meanings (e.g., an idea, a thought about something, a judgment) must be embodied." For virtual and simulated curriculum experience, embodied presence is replaced by simulations and images on the screen.

Conclusion

Whether or not we approve of programming curriculum fantasies, they are an increasingly powerful part of our education landscape. However, as educators, we still need to be mindful about what "moving curriculum online" will do to our students and to us; we still need to understand such fantasies, for they are trying to shape the way of students' subjectivity becoming.

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Biography

Xuyang Qian teaches Technology and Education at Hangzhou Normal University. She can be reached at kxyqian@gmail.com