

# In Search of a New Curriculum Theory

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## *Abstract*

In my view, because of the astounding growth and power of neoliberalism, time is rapidly running out before a *permanent* global caste system is in place. Peeking inside this future, we can see the elites and upper class living a life of unbounded luxury while the shrinking middle class is so frightened of joining the lower ranks, where drugs and violence permeate their lives, they will do whatever they are told to do, believe whatever they are told to believe, without the slightest hesitation. Since we are all **taught** to think, believe and behave as we do, this article attempts to articulate what I perceive as the deepest nature of curriculum theory that is not, as far as I know, found in the current scholarship; and for good reasons.

Rudolph Otto (1923) in his acclaimed book: *The Idea of the Holy* argues persuasively that logic and reason alone are inadequate to answer our deepest questions. In addition, this article uses a variation of Albert Einstein's wisdom when he said: 'we cannot solve our problems *with the same thinking* that created them'. Standing on these great minds, and after a brief discussion on current theory, this article uses a *spiritual* analysis to illuminate an entirely different epistemology that grounds a new curriculum theory; something, as we will see, society desperately needs.

Keywords: neoliberalism, curriculum theory, authentic humans, autonomous humans

## **Introduction**

### *Connecting the Nature and Power of Capital to Curriculum Theory*

This article is informed by my dissertation that investigated the rise of neoliberalism with the expressed aim of connecting it to the problems of urban education. The findings revealed that the nature and power of capital was a root causal factor in the rise of this global phenomenon and ideology. Here, I present the connection to curriculum theory. As a note: the dissertation is titled: *The Rise of Neoliberalism: A Transrational Analysis- Towards a New Vision of Urban Education*; it will hereafter be referred to as *The Rise* in this article.

Tomas Englund (2011) from his insightful article: *The Linguistic Turn Within Curriculum Theory*, will fuel this part of our discussion. A prior detailed analysis on the nature and power of capital from *The Rise* argued that it can help explain some of the derisive and socially harmful universal claims like whites are socially superior to blacks and men are socially superior to women. It addresses the question: where do these false claims come from? The

unlocking key in that investigation was Jürgen Habermas' interpretation of Karl Marx on capital, where he claimed that **language** creates what he calls 'gigantic social forces'. His thoughts will be combined with the thoughts of Richard Rorty to make the connection between the nature and power of capital and curriculum theory hopefully clear.

Englund (2011) gets us started with the competing thoughts of Jürgen Habermas (1987, 2000) and University of Chicago philosopher Richard Rorty (2000) concerning universal validity claims like the ones just mentioned. Englund claims that the lesson to be drawn from the Habermas/Rorty debate is about the necessity or not of understanding ordinary empirical assertions *as universal validity claims*.

In this debate, Habermas displays a commitment to justify them rationally to any and all potential challengers as necessary, while Rorty, on the other hand, argues for a more particularistic justificatory responsibility. While both have strong merits, I will use Rorty's position to make the connection. And let us not leave out the most important question(s): with the more than abundant valid criticism *against* such pernicious and derisive universal assertions, how can we possibly change such thinking? What would it take? How is curriculum theory involved?

Referring to the debate, Englund (2011) now asks the relevant questions: "What does this mean for an analysis of educational policy and for curriculum theory? Are there any possible implications for an analysis of what is going on in classrooms from this debate?" (p. 202). I was pleased to see that Englund seems to position his thinking much as I do and does not care too much about how this debate impacts education in the classroom per se. Instead, he seems more concerned with "how we in educational policy, curricula and schooling approach knowledge, truth, democracy and a future better society" (p.202). In other words, Englund appears, as I do, to be more concerned with overall social knowledge, forces and structures and how they can be understood to change society's direction towards a better future; precisely what this article is all about. What is needed to better understand the connection is more granularity of Rorty's position. We will see that it is **language**, as a transcendent idea, that makes the connection valid.

According to Englund (2011):

In sum, it can be said that Rorty's pragmatism is a kind of naturalism. One of his primary messages is that he talks of ***vocabularies as tools***, employed by natural creatures in a natural world. As Rorty puts it: the world can, 'once we have programmed ourselves with a language', **cause us to hold beliefs**. (p. 202, emphasis added)

Now interpreting Rorty's thoughts, he begins to construct our connection with a focus on its potential value:

As different vocabularies emerge, the aim could be to further analyze these vocabularies and evaluate them: different vocabularies equip us with beliefs that are of more or less use in coping with the environment in various respects. (p. 203)

Circling this back to the idea of curriculum, Englund, using Rorty's thoughts, suggests merging different vocabularies to come up with *different beliefs*. He defines this as a research program that needs to be developed:

How is authority produced and with what kind of authority and in what ways are claims of truth and knowledge justified in different communicative spheres? How is knowledge, truth, democracy and the vision of a better world communicated in different language practices? (p. 203)

We will see soon that here, Englund is critiquing current curriculum theory; seeking new insights to add to it. This discussion on the Habermas/Rorty debate is an excellent introduction to a radically different understanding of curriculum theory. It is one that looks to add 'new vocabularies', and hence new thoughts and beliefs, to its objective to better and more fully understand our environment, and especially our involvement and interaction, *as human moral agents*, with the natural world. Still, more is needed to validate our connection.

We begin again with Englund's Habermas/Rorty debate focusing on Habermas' interpretation of Marx. We use Rorty's argument that once we have programmed ourselves with a language, it causes us to hold beliefs. Worth repeating again, two giant examples of such beliefs we hold are whites being socially superior to blacks and men being socially superior to women. I claim that they have somehow become common knowledge; truth aside of course.

Take from *The Rise* (2016):

Habermas (1968) argues that Marx always takes account of social practice that encompasses both work and interaction. From this, he argues that these relations, backed by the force of institutions, are subject to the norms that decide how responsibilities and rewards are distributed among societies' members. He claims that "The medium in which these relations of subjects and groups are normatively regulated, is known as cultural tradition. **It forms the linguistic communication structure on the basis of which subjects interpret both nature and themselves in their environment**". (p. 109, emphasis in original text)

Bypassing the lengthy details and going directly to my conclusion on the nature and power of capital:

Building on and extending the collective thoughts of Marx, Habermas and Schopenhauer, I argue that it is the **wills** of (mostly but not exclusively) white men with high access to Marx's unitary external phenomenon of capital that uses the **cognitive abilities of the structure of language to create gigantic social forces that 'calls their will to life' so that they are able to influence and dominate society to their exclusive benefit**. (p. 112, emphasis in original text)

But how is this conclusion manifested in the real world? This [capital→will→real world] connection takes many potent forms: purchasing power, military might, social status, political

influence and curriculum theory, to name a few. It is somewhat similar in nature to Pierre Bourdieu's 'forms of capital'. As everyday examples of this theoretical connection, consider this: when you have high access to this 'thing' called capital, your *will* can bring your thoughts and desires into the real world. You can now buy a new car, a gift for your spouse, take a trip overseas, start a new business, get a high social position, control local politicians, demand a business-centered curriculum, etc.; all things in the real world. Without this [capital→will→real world] connection, none of these things can happen and can only stay in your mind. Another way of understanding this connection is by asking yourself the question: how do our thoughts, or the combined thoughts of groups, get materialized?

For this article, I cannot think of a more clear, powerful and relevant example of this theoretical connection than what was documented in *The Rise* by Pauline Lipman (2010). It is, in my view, a glaring example of Marx's view on capital, Schopenhauer's idea that the wills of men bring their thoughts into existence and Habermas' idea that language creates 'gigantic social forces'. Together, they were **made real against urban education**:

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004, then mayor Richard J Daley announced the Renaissance 2010 school plan to close 60 to 70 public schools and open new schools; two thirds to be managed by private organizations or companies and staffed by non-union teachers and school employees. It was initiated by the Commercial Club of Chicago, a potent private organization of the most powerful corporate and banking CEO's and civic elites. (p. 51)

They did not seek nor need permission to do this. The effects of this is still reverberating throughout Chicago's urban communities. To add insult to injury, just one month after announcing Renaissance 2010, the mayor presided over the opening of Millennium Park, a half-billion-dollar public private project: a world class park, sculpture garden and performance space on Chicago's Lakeshore. This new park was to be a crown jewel in a reconstructed downtown of corporate towers, tourism and leisure. This is what this powerful [capital→will→real world] connection can do and why Habermas is correct in arguing that it creates gigantic social forces.

This is a good time to mention that Marx (1973) in his classic work: *Grundrisse: An Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* refers to capital as an 'animated monster' and in a later work of his, as a 'mechanical monster'. Since I am among those who consider Marx one of the truly great thinkers of the modern era, I say such potent and transcendent thinking should in some way be reflected in curriculum theory; since it purports to provide understanding of our environment.

Adding additional strength to the connection we seek to establish, Olivier (2010), in his article on Foucault and Individual Autonomy, argues "human beings are unavoidably inserted in a linguistic field where meaning and power are inseparably conjoined, in other words, where words are never innocent, but are instead inscribed with values which promote certain interests and practices at the cost of others" (p. 293).

In combining the above thoughts, the connection between the nature and power of capital and curriculum theory can now be made as Habermas, Rorty and Olivier argue that language is central to our knowledge of the social world, inseparable from power and meaning, and more importantly, as Rorty argues, creates our beliefs. From this I argue plain that **it is curriculum**

**that teaches us what to believe.** Many really **do** believe that whites **are** socially superior to blacks and that men **are** socially superior to women! Marx makes gives us capital's external unitary essence, nature and power; Habermas its mechanism of language creating gigantic social forces; Schopenhauer its connection to the human will that brings our thoughts into existence, Rorty with language creating our beliefs and Olivier arguing that is unavoidable.

We return one final time to Englund's call for new vocabularies that can *enhance* our understanding of our environment with 'new beliefs', and Habermas' call for the need to explain the *root cause* of universal language assertions, such as our two pernicious examples, to all who question it. I argue that **together**, they take us forward with new vigor and 'tools', to use Rorty's exact term, to develop a **more responsive model of curriculum theory** that is grounded in the nature and power of capital to confront and address, not support and maintain, society's major problems that are thoroughly soaked in neoliberalism.

In a highly relevant side note, Zohar & Marshall (1994) from their groundbreaking book: *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics and a New Social Vision*, provide us with Rorty's 'new vocabularies as tools' that will aid in formulating a new curriculum theory. Their thoughts are grounded in quantum science as a means of understanding the limits of Newtonian physics; not rejecting it, but putting it in its proper place. They highlight, via science, the social difference between determinism and indeterminism; or what I refer to as 'either/or' versus 'and/both' thinking respectively. I'm sure the reader can sense how ultimately shattering this can be to our deterministic world known as modernity. I claim that the connection between quantum science and social theory brings tremendous hope based on a new view of reality. I detail this in a separate work. The most powerful new term they introduce to us non-physicists is **simultaneity** that I extend to ground a new 'and/both' thinking paradigm. Once understood, its potential to change the very way we think about our world and ourselves is staggering. Obviously, this is far out of scope with this article yet heavily related. It is being mentioned here to give the reader a sense that a new curriculum theory, to be introduced later, is grounded in a new epistemology.

Finally, this introduction has hopefully shown that by connecting the nature and power of capital to curriculum theory, its enormous power to influence society on its deepest and most fundamental levels has been shown. Next, a brief examination of *why* a new theory is needed.

### **Curriculum Theory Today**

Flowing from the above discussion on the connection between curriculum theory and the nature and power of capital, Morrison (2004) seems to agree with Englund and myself as he refers to recent scholarship on curriculum theory as 'the quick and the dead':

Recycling ideas leads to curriculum closure; it goes nowhere. Novelty and originality are required to move forward the fields of curriculum theory and development. However one may wish to package it, the message is the same: move on, discover and invent new worlds and new ideas. (p. 487)

First, clearly connecting to Rorty's position above concerning new vocabularies as tools causing new beliefs, Morrison's 'discover and move on with new ideas' is just what this article attempts. But why does he take this strong, bold and harsh position on curriculum? He says that prescriptions for a revitalized curriculum theory offered by Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003) do not, unfortunately, take us to new worlds or new places. Instead he claims they are 'paving the cow paths' providing us with successor theories and contemplative theories rather than advancing the arena of curriculum theory. I say he hits the nail on the head when he argues "they are decorating yesterday's paradigms with new flowers, which too will fade and die" (p. 487).

Morrison argues passionately that any new theory of curriculum should abandon any 'grand unified theory' and instead 'celebrate a hundred thousand theories and stories', however uncomfortable, difficult, and intractable this may render the curriculum field. He further argues that if there is to be a prescription for a new curriculum theory, *authenticity*, discovery, diversity, novelty, multiplicity, fecundity, and creativity should be the hallmarks of the refashioned field.

He provides an excellent introduction to what I mean by creating authentic human beings as the objective of a new curriculum theory from our upcoming spiritual analysis. But what does this idea of authentic human beings really mean within curriculum theory? A good deal of the explanation can be found in Morrison's understanding of what good curriculum theory should and should not be.

Some background of his significant disappointment with the work of Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003), and why, will get us started:

Approaching their paper, I was excited by the possibility of freshness and rebirth; sadly, I was disappointed. Their paper was neither a midwife of a new theory nor a new theoretical baby. Rather, as Kolakowski (1978: 378) remarks, it was a statement of the value of theory rather than the theory itself, and the edifice of their renaissance rests on only four pillars: 'curriculum boundaries', 'history is with all of us', 'from ideology to ideas', and 'the interplay of theory and practice'. Not only do these, themselves, hark back to earlier curriculum principles, but they are little more than statements of the obvious, however important it may be to restate the obvious at times. (p. 489)

To this, Morrison adds that if curriculum theory is to survive it must come out of the protected, perhaps introverted world of academe and must embrace the complicated, tension-ridden, uncertain, complex, contradictory, messy, uncontrollable, and wonderful world of people. "Yet, what we see in the many branches of the curriculum theory field is the reverse: a dull world of the familiar and the repetitive" (p. 489).

Getting more specific, he argues that the curriculum theory field defined by Wraga and Hlebowitsh is doomed to entropy because it is a closed system using existing conceptual tools and existing paradigms. It is marked by the familiar, in a world where science and social science are on a quest for the unfamiliar and the unknown. Their prescriptions, defining nothing ontological, epistemological, or cosmological, are tired; they need a breath of fresh air:

Curriculum theory is moribund, with its graffiti often etched for a cabal of followers and with its own sacred texts of different hue, and trading in a few well-turned phrases. How often does curriculum theory in the academy comprise a study of set ideas, set texts, and set authors, in alphabetical order: Apple, Bruner, Dewey, Doll, Giroux, Ornstein, Pinar, Tanner, Tyler, and so on? Of course, all are worthy, but is this enough? Look at the self-referencing that takes place in curriculum-theory papers. Are scientists or economists still debating or referring to their theoretical principles of five decades ago? **We need a coming-of-age party**; the curriculum theory field must grow up or be condemned to the perpetual childhood of an emergent discipline. And how should it grow up?

I suggest that curriculum theory must come out of the confines of the academy. It must draw on the academy, **but must transcend it**. If the curriculum becomes the preserve of curricularists, then surely it is doomed. It is rather like saying that religion must only be the preserve of theologians, or eating must only be the preserve of chefs. Curriculum theory is not hagiography. Just as the saying goes that the more politically sensitive a topic is, the more it should not be left to politicians, so the more the discussion about curriculum theory grows, the more it should not be left to curriculum theorists. **Democracy demands that a multiplicity of voices be heard on curricular matters.** (p. 490, emphasis added)

He's opined quite a bit. To begin, I think it's clear to the reader that Morrison has a very low opinion of the recent scholarship efforts in curriculum theory. He pulls no punches in his argument that a 'breath of fresh air' is desperately needed to save curriculum theory from complete irrelevance; in a world, as he next describes, seemingly imploding right before it. As if putting the icing on the cake, he now displays his thoughts that coincide nicely with major findings from *The Rise*:

The world suffers (in the USA and elsewhere), dies young, 'is wasted by systematic greed' (O'Neill 1995: 196), bombs its neighbors or is bombed, starves, is diseased, lacks basic sanitation, exploits already-exploited nations, cannot educate its population even to primary levels, **globalizes to serve corporate interests, is prey to rampant consumerism and unbridled materialism, perpetuates gross racism, sexism, chauvinism, and ageism, violates human rights and freedoms of speech, assembly, expression, employment, and religion, detention without trial, and so on.** Yet, the neat and tidy sphere of curriculum theory continues its sterile, rarified, and self-serving agenda in its retreat into the safe house of academe. ***It is comparatively untouched by the outside world.*** While the rest of the world is in seething turmoil, the curriculum theory of Wraga and Hlebowitsh is raking through the ruins of a few wrung-out concepts; it is simply an irrelevance;

it is a theory of nothing. Why do not curriculum theorists rage a little more against the dying of the light? **Where is the conscience of curriculum theory?** (p. 490, emphasis added)

My response to Morrison's last question is that the conscience of curriculum theory is missing because it does not attach itself to, nor understand, our true authentic self; something we will discuss soon. I argue it is instead attached to the profit maximization edict of neoliberalism that has no room for a conscience.

Furthermore, Morrison appears to be in lock step with my own unflattering claim about academia that says: '*while we continue endless debate: **Rome is burning***'! He bolsters this by adding the thoughts of Nietzsche's scathing attack on scholars: "They sit in the cool shade: they want to be mere spectators in everything and they take care not to sit where the sun burns upon the steps. Like those who stand in the street and stare at the people passing by, so they too wait and stare at thoughts that others have thought" (p. 490). He argues that curriculum theory should not be a spectator theory; it is an involved theory; those who theorize are, of necessity, participants. I could not agree more.

We now wrap up our quotes from Morrison as he concludes his attack on curriculum theory. It is soothed a bit by a rational pragmatism before suggesting what he thinks it should be:

Do we really want the curriculum field to echo Seneca, where human excellence aims to be like the stars: pitiless, passionless, perfect? We have all kinds of needs for those we love. Rather than being beautiful, but bloodless and lifeless like monumental alabaster, curriculum theory and development needs to be a theory and development not only with a practical intent but a theory with **a passionate intent:**

**We need a theory that catches the dynamics of human life, that celebrates its throbbing vitality,** not four simple labels that purport to guide theory. Of course, we need academicians and theoreticians, but curriculum theory and theoreticians cannot trade in a few key ideas from yesterday. While the rest of the world gets on with life and living, it seems from Wraga and Hlebowitsh that the academics of curriculum theory have turned their back on life and have retreated into contemplative security; very nice for them, perhaps, but of little help to the rest of us. (p. 491, emphasis added)

If we combine the thoughts of Englund, Marx, Rorty, Habermas, Schopenhauer, Oliver and Morrison to our discussion on the nature and power of capital, we have hopefully added new insights to the scholarship. We now hear additional rebukes of current curriculum theory; this time with clearer connections to neoliberalism.

Keirl (2015) tells us that "the curriculum that serves only a localized group of children is both a selfish curriculum and one that disempowers those children it purports to serve" (p. 1). He stresses that curriculum theory is not something apart from its socio-political context, a critical point that will be addressed shortly in more detail. Getting directly to his main criticism, he asks: "Are curricula working from vision-led orientations of sustainable global futures or are they



consolidating the destructive status quo? If neoliberalism is the worsening global problem of the last thirty-plus years then orthodox curricula are part of that problem” (p. 8). This helps set the stage for our upcoming spiritual analysis of curriculum theory.

García & De Lissovoy (2013) increase the heat with their discussion of a ‘hidden curriculum’ that they define as such:

The hidden curriculum is the process of socialization by which youth are prepared, in subjective terms, to enter the workforce of capitalism. In other words, the hidden curriculum, as ideological process, secures the reproduction of the conditions of production. The school, as an institution within the state, serves to produce the subjects that are required for the novel social conditions of the neoliberal era. (p. 49).

They use the thoughts of Bowles & Gintis to propose that schools, through overt and hidden curriculum, reproduce the social relationships necessary for capitalism to continue to exist; a point that will be analyzed mathematically shortly. They suggest that employers are interested in hiring workers with the same sets of cognitive and non-cognitive skills valued by the schools. They argue: “It requires workers with specific forms of consciousness, behavior, and personalities to ensure its persistence and reproduction” (p. 51).

In what I believe to be a very specific targeting of urban schools, they next argue:

Through the hidden curriculum, the schools must discipline students to accept the conditions of servile wage work: the hidden curriculum can be understood as working to normalize the **construction of students as disposable subjects and as disciplining those positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy.** (p. 54, emphasis added)

This makes me very angry. I see no need for interpretation of their thoughts as they seem crystal clear and self-explanatory. We now move on to further elaborate on the above criticisms of curriculum theory today with equally potent but less harsh views.

Mary Koutselini (1997) presents an interesting look at how we may be viewing the idea of curriculum theory today. As a note, the words curricula and curriculum will be used as equivalents. She starts with a nice straightforward definition of what today’s curriculum theory does and is. I find it a solid assessment:

The curriculum as the realization of Philosophy, the development of aims and processes, and the selection of worthwhile knowledge is an expression of educational policy, and is directly inter-linked with the state, the political and normative composition of the educational system. In this case, curricula have been used as a means of social, economic, cultural control and development, and also as **a mechanism for the reproduction and generation of norms and ideologies.** (p. 88, emphasis added)

I think the reader may already see from the structural nature of her definition, how urban education is, *through curriculum*, wholly under the control of the power of ideology. Stating this differently, Koutselini next says that the extent of the validity of curricula, or its wider acceptance, depends on the unifying power that the prevalent ideology has at each point in time. I cannot overemphasize this important point. This is an interpretation that explains curricula *history*.

Without a doubt, neoliberalism is the prevalent ideology in current times. From this, it is clear she is saying that curriculum is a function and extension of the ideology of the time, *not something independent itself*. This, in my view, supports the Frankfurt School that argues, among other things, that our thinking is the result of our environment and not the other way around. This is a critical idea that merits further examination.

Koutselini (1997) provides a very brief curriculum history that supports this. It is worth quoting at length as it leads us nicely to the question of what is the most accurate way to view curriculum in our current neoliberal times. This in turn will point us towards using her thoughts on curriculum history and connect them to urban education today:

The church in Europe, as an institution with broad social organization, supported the struggles of people for survival and salvation. It institutionalized the knowledge of the Holy Books and directed education towards the cultivation of metaphysics, the faith in power outside the person and the reproduction of the great truths beyond reason. Modern Europe since the Enlightenment, projects reason as a unifying force counter imposed to religion. With the parallel establishment of nations, the concept of national identity, emerged. **The National ideologies were strengthened and established though curricula;** and their consolidation became one of the fundamental aims of the education of the people of Europe. A second aim was the production of new knowledge which was based on rationalism. In the History of Education, these two general aims acquired universal validity and dominated until the end of the twentieth century. The question that emerges concerns whether this situation is different today. (p. 88, emphasis added)

From this she properly asks: What are the characteristics of our era today? What is the unifying reason which can claim validity even at the general level of the aims of education and the curricula? She now answers her own questions:

The frames of reference and identification of our era appear on the one hand through the concepts of modernism, pre-modernism and postmodernism, and, on the other hand, through the institutional frame works of the European Union and globalization. One characteristic of our time is that the concepts which were relevant to modernism have exceeded the historical boundaries of their creation (the eighteenth and nineteenth century) and appear not as eras but as culture, ethos, **a way of life and thinking characterized by the Enlightenment view of physical reality** (Rorty, 1985). From this point of view, the universe was a deterministic system in which the

law of cause and effect dominated the uniqueness of social and personal life (Foucault, 1992). (p. 88, emphasis added)

First, she makes some strong points that I am in full agreement with. Danah Zohar (1990) from her illuminating book: *The Quantum Self: Human Nature and Consciousness Defined by the New Physics*, claims that our feeling of alienation comes from a feeling that we humans are somehow strangers in the universe, merely accidental by-products of blind evolutionary forces with no special role to play in the grand scheme of things. Koutselini (1997) appears to agree as she argues:

Twentieth-century response to the depersonalization of life created existentialism, the theory that a person is a unique individual in a meaningless world, responsible for his/her unpredictable actions. Another essential characteristic of contemporary social inquiry is the shift in the way we perceive 'being in the world' which is grounded in a crisis in legitimation of knowledge and of the traditional identification of human relations to the world. (p 89)

The critical ideas in both is that they represent the Enlightenment's materialistic worldview that is a by-product of Newtonian and Cartesian analytic science which separates human beings from nature and each other and the feeling of alienation that that brings.

I am also very strongly in agreement with her when she argues:

Curricula gradually becomes the arena of the experts in the technique of curriculum development, the procedures and the technocratic models according to which the effectiveness of the system consists in the accomplishment of predetermined aims and procedures. In that view, teaching was perceived as a set of measurable and pragmatic skills and techniques based on the concept of correctness which ignores the pedagogic good in a caring situation. (p. 89)

Here, Koutselini presents an excellent descriptive rationale for what is infamously referred to these days as 'high-stakes standardized testing' that so polarizes many in the field of education. It has a well-earned, well-documented disproportionate negative impact on urban teachers, schools and students. And as if this is not enough, Koutselini, using the work of Foucault (1961, 1970, 1980) exposes the chilling, hurtful core power dynamics that modern curriculum theory produces and reproduces:

As observed by Foucault, the rule-based and limit-imposing reason does not only subdue within the closed institution of the asylum, it also constrains the needs of the individual, in wider society. Thus, the archetype of the closed institution resurfaces in the shape of the factory, the prison, the army, *even the school*. Their characteristics are their system-based operation under the bureaucratic control of rationality, and their continuous reproduction at the expense of the persons to whom they refer. The rationalistic drama is played out at the expense of the freedom of the person; **it destroys the**

**critical confrontation of things, alienates persons from themselves and their surroundings, and treats persons as objects, with routine obligations in a mechanistic system.** (p. 89, emphasis added)

Again, this is self-explanatory. In my view, while this understanding and use of curriculum as a self-sustaining and self-survival power arm of the controlling ideology of the time, it has a long history that predates modernity, as shown by Koutselini above. So, what is new then? I argue that modernity, specifically its late current stage of neoliberalism, has exacerbated this idea to very dangerous levels. Margaret Thatcher's potent argument that **there is no alternative** to her neoliberal policies come to mind. Such unashamed brashness should not be underestimated.

I cannot think of a more relevant and crystal-clear manifestation of this Foucauldian reproductive power dynamic in schools than the ascendancy of business courses in most educational institutions at the expense of liberal arts courses. The humanities, i.e., the arts, music, poetry, dance, philosophy, history and religion, to name a few, are now considered by many students as next to worthless compared to mathematics, accounting, finance, information technology and business courses. In a highly consumer-driven world, students know well that they can earn much more money with the latter. A brief diversion on this trend in schools and what it means in this article is warranted:

*The Ascendancy of Business Courses.*

I begin with Bennett (1984) in his thorough report: *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*. It is, in my view, a bit gut-wrenching and soul-searching:

Although more than 50 percent of America's high school graduates continue their education at American colleges and universities, few of them can be said to receive there an adequate education in the culture and civilization of which they are members. Most of our college graduates remain shortchanged in the humanities history; literature, philosophy, and the ideals and practices of the past that have shaped the society they enter. **The fault lies principally with those of us whose business it is to educate these students.** We have blamed others, but the responsibility is ours. Not by our words but by our actions, by our indifference, and by our intellectual diffidence, we have brought about this condition. **It is we the educators-- not scientists, business people, or the general public--** who too often have given up the great task of transmitting a culture to its rightful heirs. Thus, what we have on many of our campuses is an unclaimed legacy, a course of study in which the humanities have been siphoned off, diluted, or so adulterated that students graduate knowing little of their heritage. All too often, the report asserts, teaching can be "lifeless or tendentious, mechanical or ideological. On too many campuses the curriculum has become a self-service cafeteria through which students pass without being nourished." (p. 61, emphasis added)

To all us educators, I say this is a ‘gentlemen’s smack in our collective faces’. What I love about this is that Bennett does not pass the buck elsewhere and tries to call a spade a spade. While I am certainly 100% on his side, I believe he may be underestimating the power dynamics at play. Educators are not cowards, as this stinging yet correct analysis may suggest to some. In my opinion, they are simply overwhelmed by a far stronger opponent that **forces** them into the thinking and action that many do not truly believe in within themselves. I cannot argue strongly enough that that opponent is, without question, the powerful global phenomenon and ideology of neoliberalism.

In support of this neoliberal influence, Kim, Markham, & Cangelosi (2002) begin their quantitative analysis and study of the upward trends in students taking business courses. They claim that understanding why and how business students choose their specialization may help administrators promote their programs to attract enough quality students to meet the needs of the business community. Furthermore, they argue: “these considerations have implications for how courses are taught and how business curricula might be modified to meet the needs of students and prospective employees” (p. 28).

Flynn & Vredevoogd (2010) add to this by claiming first that globalization will influence and shape all aspects of teaching and learning. Colleges and universities will be expected to deliver more education in less space ‘to increase their learning per square foot’. There are two aspects to this statement: (1) the expectation that higher education, in the face of unparalleled fiscal challenges, will be asked to do more with less, and (2) the need for colleges to become more efficient when responding to calls for greater accountability. Furthermore, they argue:

Competition for students and resources will force colleges and universities to sharpen their brands and identities and to distinguish themselves in new ways. The current economic situation has created many challenges for higher education. Publicly funded institutions are facing cuts at the state and federal level, and endowments are declining in value as fluctuations in the stock market diminish investments. According to FinAid (2009), a leading financial aid Web site, tuition tends to increase on average about eight percent per year. This tuition inflation rate means that the cost of college doubles every nine years. For a baby born today, tuition will triple by the time the child matriculates to college. To attract qualified, motivated students, colleges and universities must find ways to appeal to the best and brightest. In this regard, **they are no different than corporations** that seek to attract the most talented workers. A positive image translates into sales for corporations and enrollment for higher education institutions. (p. 8, emphasis added)

Most critically they argue:

Colleges and universities will become increasingly important parts of regional economic development, both in creating growth and taking advantage of it. The relationship between campus and community is becoming increasingly interdependent. This is primarily because of the growing demands of economic

development and the role colleges and universities play in the training and retraining of the workforce. (p. 9)

These points make it clear that higher education and educators themselves have been thoroughly influenced by the economic forces imbedded in neoliberalism. While Bennett's analysis is correct, I for one, cannot come to pin the blame on educators; even though conceptually that is where the blame belongs. We now end this small diversion on the ascendancy of business courses at the expense of liberal arts courses in our universities and how that is attached to enabling and sustaining neoliberalism. We next advance to the logic of mathematics to show how a potential change in curriculum theory can impact our neoliberal society, at least theoretically.

### *A Quantitative Rationale for Curriculum Theory Change*

Let's recall the thoughts of Bowles & Gintis that schools, through overt and hidden curriculum, reproduce the social relationships necessary for capitalism to continue to exist, and the above discussion on the dramatic change in the importance of business courses at the expense of liberal arts courses in many schools. From their combination, I propose a ray of hope and a strategy. The bottom line here is that curriculum theory, as understood by Koutselini and others, and something I agree with, is a *function* of an ideology; with today's ideology being neoliberalism. The word function is being used here to mean 'enabler and sustainer'. Simply put, in current times curriculum theory, with its accelerated emphasis on business related courses over the liberal arts, sustains and supports neoliberalism.

I take the liberty of presenting this idea mathematically, for reasons soon to be apparent, to propose that:  $N=f(C)$  which says that as the power of neoliberalism 'N' grows on society, the more the need for a business curriculum 'C' to sustain it. The ascendancy of business related courses in our schools as the result of the ever-expanding influential neoliberal ideology of our times, is another way of stating this. Simply put, in our equation, the stronger neoliberalism accelerates its grip on global society, the stronger the acceleration of business-based curriculum to sustain it.

We can add additional symbolism to this proposed equation that will enhance its usage and explain why it can also represent a hope and a strategy:  $\uparrow N=f(\uparrow C)$ . We are now more specifically saying that as N increases, C increases. BUT, using basic laws of math, we can reverse the sides and signs so that this must also be true:  $(\downarrow C)=f(\downarrow N)$  which is saying that *if*, and I admit that that is a big if, the sustaining and enabling function of curriculum, via the ascendancy of business courses to support and sustain neoliberalism changes (goes down), so will the power and grip of neoliberalism on society change (go down). This is the quantitative rationale for a new theory of curriculum specifically designed to combat the neoliberal ideology of our very troubled times.

Thus far, this article has hopefully shown that there is a clear connection between curriculum theory and neoliberalism; with urban education being trapped in that unfortunate dynamic. In *The Rise*, Peck & Tickell (2002) argue 'it seems to be everywhere'. They are right. I repeat, it is a phenomenon that is rapidly constructing a **permanent** global caste system right before our eyes. It is not a stretch to claim that for most people, it has already reached the point where many just throw up their hands and concede *this is just the way life is* and there is nothing we can do about it. Let us not forget Margaret Thatcher's famous argument where, in defending

her neoliberal policies to critics, she claimed: **there is no alternative**. In my view, this helps explain why many intelligent, capable researchers conclude, sadly, that only some form of destruction and violence can change things. I consider their thoughts well considered, but wrong.

I admit that to this point, there is little most readers have not heard; as the arguments against current curriculum theory, particularly as it impacts urban education, are plentiful in the scholarship. I have presented but a few to serve as background to precede *why* a spiritual analysis is necessary and *how* it will be used to give a new curriculum theory the conscience and relevancy, Morrison passionately argues is missing today.

### *Segue to a Spiritual Analysis*

Einstein once famously described insanity as doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting different results. I stand on his great shoulders to argue that is it insane of us to think that we can conceive of a new curriculum theory using the same thinking we used to derive the current theory; no matter how hard we try. If this is true, are we then stuck without a way forward? The answer is no. But this begs the question, what do I mean by *using the same thinking*? A full explanation is unfortunately out of scope with this article; yet a condensed introduction to what it means is clearly warranted.

In a highly simplified and possibly too brief an overview for targeted for us non-physicists, recent discoveries in quantum science suggest a radically different view of reality, where classical physics is now deemed inaccurate and inadequate. To my mind, from a social perspective, it comes down to Newton's determinism versus quantum science's indeterminism. From these discoveries, there is now considerable scholarship connecting and reconciling faith and science. As an example, MacKay (1974) from her article: *Complementarity in Scientific and Theological Thinking* brilliantly connects the two. I say, then, *our same thinking*, is grounded in determinism, that views faith and science as two distinct unconnected realms of thought with the latter seen as superior and the former superstition and baseless.

Rudolph Otto (1923) warns us that by using reason and logic *alone*, i.e., the grounds of science, **we have not exhausted** our investigation of a phenomenon. From his powerful thinking, this article will use a unique methodology I refer to as 'transrationalism' in its search for a new curriculum theory. It is a combination of rational and non-rational (not irrational) thinking that allows us to probe deeper in our quest for a new curriculum theory. It should be noted that non-rational thinking is defined by Howard (1991) who tells us that the non-rational falls under narrative or storytelling as an approach to increasing human knowledge; what this article is after. Herein lies the soundness and logic of using scripture in our search for a new curriculum theory.

With the above lines of thought as background, this article assumes that an *indeterminate way of thinking* allows us to probe deeper in our quest. It understands science and faith as complimentary, not contradictory and separate, ways of thinking. **Our new thinking**, then, is grounded in the indeterminism of quantum science as a valid alternative means of logical thinking. But still, why do we need a *spiritual* analysis of curriculum theory? Where will it lead us? What could its value be?

## A Spiritual Analysis of Curriculum Theory

Schmitt-Stegmann (1997) argues “every educational theory has behind it a certain image of the human being, even if this is not explicitly stated. In our present time, this image is very much connected to our mechanistic world conception, i.e. human abilities are often compared to those of computers and in this comparison, human beings fall short.” (p.2). Consider this: we often hear people speak of ‘needing some input’ or ‘giving valuable output’; many say that our brains are the ‘hardware’ and our minds the ‘software’, yet still, you hear people say we get ‘turned on’ or ‘turned off’. All these terms seem to have a real meaning for us and at the same time shows clearly that we have incorporated technology into the very way we see ourselves.

This idea of analyzing curriculum theory using what could be interpreted as spiritual terms is not new. Schmitt-Stegmann (1997) presents a known curriculum theory that relates to our current efforts: “the goal of the Waldorf curriculum and teaching methods is to unlock the true potential living in each child, **the true Self**, which gradually awakens to its natural and human-cultural environment and its true Self and abilities” (p. 2, emphasis added). You will see this is what we are after, but what can she mean by the ‘true self’?

Zinkin (2008) adds to the difficulty of our task of seeking a definition of the ‘true self’. Building on the work of Carl Jung, he argues that it is not difficult to see why everyone struggles with it because it is so hard to define: “Whether we turn to Jung’s own definition in *Psychological Types* (Jung 1921/1971, para. 789– 791) or to the *Critical Dictionary* (Plaut, Samuels & Shorter 1986) we are still left bemused. **What could be more important than becoming ‘who one truly is’?**” (p. 390, emphasis added). What he is saying, in my view, is that with some of the best minds on the subject, this most important quest for a definition of the ‘true self’ still eludes them. I can safely say for sure that if it eludes them, it will certainly elude me. I will not therefore depend on my own direct thinking to define what the ‘true self’ is. I need the help of *different thinking from a different source*; as I know my own limitations. From the above thoughts, it’s clear that defining and understanding our ‘true self’ is not as intuitive as many may suppose. Whatever the answer, it will help ground our new curriculum theory. Our spiritual analysis now officially begins:

I start by assuming the reader already knows what a theory is and ask: what is *curriculum* theory? As one might expect, there are no shortages of definitions in the scholarship. For those I’ve read, I find most worthy and pretty much on equal par with each other. I will use the thoughts of Beauchamp (1982) where a particular definition in his solid work fits nicely with my attempt to analyze curriculum theory from a spiritual perspective. He claims that optimally, curriculum theory should provide a statement ‘outlining the goals the curriculum was designed for’. This makes perfect sense to me and I think intuitive to the reader.

To satisfy this, I state right from the beginning that a new curriculum theory should be **designed to develop authentic human beings as its goal**. But what do I mean by authentic human beings? The answer, as you will soon see, is a spiritual one that connects to Einstein where he argues that different thinking is necessary to solve our problems; that different thinking in our quest is non-rational. Otto (1923) tells us that logic and reason *alone* are inadequate to



answer our deeper questions like: what is our true self? We begin by setting up the stark distinction between what this article means by autonomous versus authentic human beings.

### *Autonomous Human Beings*

This article defines human beings developed by the potent and harmful current curriculum theory as autonomous. I argue they *become* this way because of it; as none of us are *born* this way. **We had to be taught.** But what does ‘this way’ mean? Key synonyms for autonomous human beings are independent, self-directed, self-sufficient, self-ruling, analytical, selfish and separate. I readily admit that most would think these to be mostly honorable, accurate and worthy descriptors of us, and from certain perspectives, they are. Autonomous human beings are atomistic; i.e. their separateness defines them. Their understanding of reality is Newtonian based; i.e., what Zohar & Marshall (1994) argue is now outdated; replaced by quantum theory as more accurate and meaningful.

Before proceeding, we need to be a bit more precise here. Olivier (2010) who discusses Foucault’s idea of autonomy, warns us that in truth, no one can be completely autonomous. At best, he argues, one can be ‘relatively’ autonomous, since no matter how independently-minded we may be, we are all, to some degree, dependent on other people, on conventions and on things that we did not create; such as language. Nevertheless, Olivier says that it still makes sense to speak of autonomous people, as long as we realize we are speaking about *relative* autonomy.

With this more precise meaning, I argue autonomous humans seek, enable, support and sustain ideologies grounded in selfishness and extreme inequality. Why? Because of the power of curriculum to intentionally, and with a specific purpose, develop the human mind. I am very confident in saying that no one is *born* greedy, selfish, racist, analytical, sexist, or violent; we had to be **taught** to think, believe and act the way we do. Autonomous human beings are, in my view, sadly trapped within Wink’s (1992) materialistic worldview where he says: “in this view, there is no heaven, no God, no soul – nothing but material existence and what can be known through the five senses and reason. The spiritual self is an illusion. There is no higher self; we are mere complexities of matter, and when we die, we cease to exist except as the chemicals and atoms that once constituted us” (p.5).

Critically, within this worldview, autonomous human beings, because of their outdated Newtonian view of reality, pit one thing against the other; be it religions, political views, sexes, races, nations, cultures, beliefs, families, economies; even friends. I argue this ‘either/or’ way of thinking is the root of our nation’s political dysfunction; as in ‘either’ Democrats ‘or’ Republicans. The two have never been as far apart with one side now despising the other with a venom. One does not need to be a prophet to see where we all may be headed because of this way of thinking.

Several years ago, I wrote a play entitled: *The Pit - The Road to Salvation*. It is a unique discourse on God. I would like to insert two sentences from it that dramatically captures what this article means by autonomous human beings trapped by their ‘either/or’ way of thinking:

***We are all like captive passengers firmly buckled down in a runaway train that is on the express track heading south. We know who the engineer of that train is.***

I did not realize that years later, my play would connect very directly to Rosa's (2013) social acceleration theory; what he calls a new theory of modernity. He argues very convincingly that we are trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of increasing acceleration in all facets of society with no end in sight.

Relating all this back to curriculum theory, this article argues plainly that current curriculum theory *intentionally* develops us into autonomous human beings because, as our quantitative rationale showed, that is what is required to support and sustain neoliberalism. In a final connection to our runaway train, we are buckled down in it not physically but mentally, because of the power of curriculum to develop the *way* we think as in 'either/or', in addition to *what* we think, as in our priority to quantify things.

Next, we begin with an academic approach to what this article means by *authentic* human beings. This is followed by a spiritual approach that starts with my own observations on children that leads us to specific scripture for answers; the way one would follow bread crumbs on a trail where one is lost and needing directions. As a note, for our purposes, the phrases 'true self' and 'authentic human beings' are interchangeable and deemed equivalent.

#### *Authentic Human Beings – A Brief Academic Investigation*

In what may seem as an odd place to begin understanding the idea of authentic human beings, we look to thoughts found in tourism literature. Steiner & Reisinger (2006) claim that its meaning tends to be a muddled amalgam of philosophical, psychological, and spiritual concepts. "The problem is compounded within tourism because the term is often used in two distinct senses: authenticity as genuineness or realness of artifacts or events *and* as a human attribute signifying being one's true self or **being true to one's essential nature**" (p. 299, emphasis added). Our focus will be on the latter or what the authors term existential authenticity.

Leaning on the thoughts of Hegel, Heidegger, Kant, Sartre, and Kierkegaard, the authors claim that the concept of existential authenticity is not a product of tourism research, but is instead part of a long philosophical tradition concerned with what it means to be human, what it means to be happy, and what it means to be oneself. We will address these very points directly as part of our spiritual investigation next. For now, they give us a nice beginning definition of authentic human beings we can use that connects to curriculum theory:

Being in touch with one's inner self, knowing one's self, having a sense of one's own identity and then living in accord with one's sense of one's self is being authentic (Kierkegaard 1985). To be authentic, people need to make themselves as they want to be. They must assert their will in the choices made when confronted by possibilities (Sartre 1992). **Being attuned to one's own experiences rather than interpreting the world through institutionalized concepts and abstractions makes people authentic individuals.** (p. 300, emphasis added)

This is a splendid beginning. They go on to add that reality itself is meaningless and people must make meaning by how they live their lives in order to experience authentic existence. I am in complete agreement and argue, from this, that current curriculum theory

intentionally rejects this line of thinking because it would not support the ideology of our times as it is designed to do. In other words, existential authenticity and neoliberalism are incompatible concepts as 'being attuned to one's experiences' is, for the most part, opposed to 'interpreting the world through institutionalized concepts'. This will make much more sense as we proceed.

We next look at the work of Ladkin & Taylor (2010) who examine the concept of 'authentic leadership' that can help construct our case for a new theory of curriculum. They begin with a rather interesting story about Barack Obama's election to the presidency. According to them, Obama surprisingly won the Iowa primary and polls indicated that he held a substantial lead over Hillary Clinton heading into New Hampshire. Yet he lost that primary by 3 percentage points. The media attributed the Clinton victory to a very specific event in the final stages of the New Hampshire primary; it was coined 'Hillary's Tears':

For the first time in public Hillary Clinton evidenced the strain and stress... You see the emotion, you see the tears beginning to well in Hillary Clinton's face, and the voice cracks just a bit... We spoke with women voters after the interview and many of them were moved by Hillary Clinton's show of emotion. Fox News 8 January 2008. (p. 2)

The authors claim this represents a crucial factor in the idea of authenticity; the way in which the 'true self' is enacted. The authors correctly add that only Hillary Clinton knows if this was her revealing her 'true self'.

According to Ladkin & Taylor (2010) "there seems to be an underlying assumption informing much of the authentic leadership literature that knowing one's 'true self' and behaving from that self-referential place will automatically be communicated to followers who will experience the leader as authentic" (p. 5). This of course may or may not be true, yet the authors say that presently, one of the difficulties with the concept from a theoretical perspective is that a unified, agreed definition for authentic leadership does not exist. To my mind, this may possibly stem from an inability to articulate an intuitive, or at least a logical understanding and definition of the 'true self' that is *independent of any application of it*; a task we will be taking up shortly.

For our final academic look, Brook (2009) in his article: *The Potentiality of Authenticity in Becoming a Teacher*, provides a direct connection to curriculum theory. The following quote, leaning on the thoughts of Heidegger, is a great segue to our spiritual investigation into the source of authenticity and an understanding of the 'true self':

Heidegger formulates education in its proper sense as the formation of authenticity. In this respect authenticity signifies being truly human; which is the genuine or proper *telos* of human existence. However, Heidegger also claims that humans have a primordial tendency to fall away from our own being, or, that our everyday way of existence is to *not* be ourselves (Heidegger, 1962). Herein, **Heidegger constitutes authenticity as a problem of the potentiality for being truly human and thus, a question of how this potentiality is possible.** (p. 8, emphasis added)

I am energized by this. I claim that this ‘authentic potentiality’ Heidegger speaks about is possible through a major change in curriculum theory; a change *from* developing autonomous *to* authentic, human beings. Note that he says humans have a primordial tendency to fall away from our own being, or, that our everyday way of existence is to not be ourselves. I argue this is the result of today’s curriculum theory; as its very existence lies in support and maintenance of neoliberalism; a global ideology that exists *solely* to make the rich even richer at all costs.

What we’ve discussed so far leads us to the need for a deeper understanding of the *true self*, or, our authentic nature, as that appears to be a critical component of authenticity used by all the above authors. Once again, I reiterate, logic and reason alone are, unfortunately, inadequate to provide answers to what we seek. Using our ‘transrational methodology’, they will be used as mental support mechanisms, for lack of a better term, so that our spiritual findings still make sense to us and do not come across as meaningless gibberish. In other words, using non-rational thinking, we will still be able to ‘soak it in’ and let it ‘percolate in our minds’ to evaluate its truth and value or lack thereof; later if necessary.

### *Authentic Human beings - A Spiritual Investigation*

We have arrived at the very core of this article; its epistemological grounding. To begin our comparison with autonomous human beings, proper synonyms and phrases for *authentic* human beings would be unique, joyful, celebratory, kind, imaginative, expressive, community and global driven, open-minded, cooperative, nature and animal lovers, empathetic, passionate, compassionate, loving and spiritual. I am not suggesting that autonomous human beings have none of these characteristics; that would clearly not be true. What I *am* suggesting is that **these characteristics be intentionally developed in us from pre-kindergarten as prioritized content of a new curriculum theory**. In other words, using Beauchamp’s definition, this new curriculum theory must be designed to develop authentic human beings as its goal. But first, where do I get these synonyms and phrases for authentic human beings, or, our true self? Did I just pull them out of thin air?

To answer this question, I ask the reader to consider the following personal observations of mine to get us started: When very young children look in wonder and amazement at objects in their surroundings, they will say things like; look ma, a dog!, or look ma, a train!, or look ma, a bird! We teach our children about these things and objects in our environment and their newly formed memories produce a real joy to them and to us when they see them again. Yet it is totally unnecessary for us to teach them about the existence of human beings. We do not see that same amazement in their eyes when they see humans as they do when they see the other things just described that we taught them about. They somehow seem to recognize a fellow human being without having been taught about them and are therefore not amazed; which is amazing itself. Look ma, a human being!, was never uttered by a child.

If you look with discernment while seeing very young children gazing at other human beings, you will notice that it is not a case of *what* they are seeing, as in a car, a train or a dog, but *who* they are seeing, as in, *who* are you? not *what* are you? In addition, if you look closely at the faces of infants you will see an inquisitive look that seems to ask; *where am I?* This look would be very much like the way an adult might look after being kidnapped, losing their memory and suddenly waking up in a totally strange and unknown place having absolutely no clue where they are, how they got there and how much time has passed.

Often, we see very young children react to the sight of other humans with a smile; and automatically want to share something they may have or wave hello to someone they've never seen before. When we stretch out our arms to them, they often come to us with a loving embrace we did not teach them. We know well that parents never need to teach their children how to hug, but need to teach them how to talk or how to ride a bike. These things are of course common knowledge.

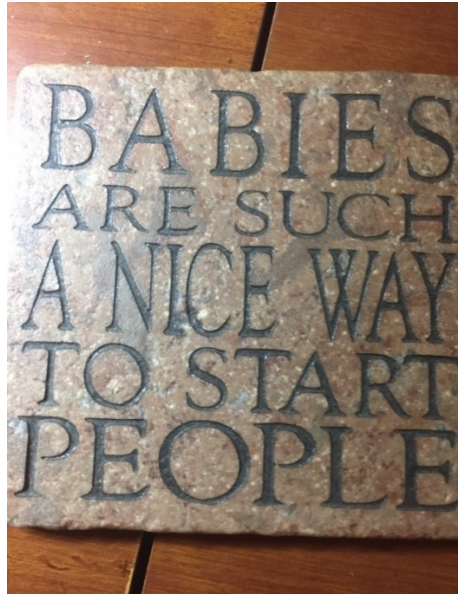
To my mind, the unique level of seemingly unwarranted happiness in children is highly curious. I say unwarranted because of the things we know that make us adults happy, like material possessions, sex, nice cars, nice clothes, money in the bank, career achievements, travel, social status, etc.; yet young children have, for the most part, none of these things. What on earth, then, makes them so happy?

Please follow closely: I recall many years ago watching a young girl about three years old playing *all by herself* in a park; no toys, no games. Her mom was busy reading something on a bench close by. This child was laughing, jumping, waving her tiny arms in the air and spinning herself in a wild joy until she just fell over! I'll never forget that. I ask the reader, what's up with that? An adult acting in a similar fashion might be deemed insane, yet no one would consider this child like that. They would properly conclude that she is just happy. The possible *source* of her happiness is the important thing for me. Where can such incredible happiness come from? For crying out loud, *at her age*, she knows next to nothing *we can think of* that can account for that level of happiness.

With these observations of children's behaviors of mine as background, consider this: current studies estimate that for our child, each of the  $10^{11}$  (one hundred billion) neurons in her mind has on average 7,000 synaptic connections to other neurons. It has been estimated that the brain of a three-year-old child has about  $10^{15}$  synapses or approximately 1 quadrillion; pointing to the unfathomable complexity of her young mind.

How does this help ground our definition of an authentic human being, or true self, and connect to curriculum theory? I argue that a full and precise understanding of the near infinite variations of thoughts and meanings in her young mind created by those trillions of neural synapses is far, far past anything within our grasp. In other words, and this is super-critical, we have absolutely no way of knowing what she is thinking **unless she decides to share her thoughts with us!**

Let's now combine this with my observations of children's behaviors. The following image of a stone tablet I've had for years should pave the way to establish their connection to authentic human beings, or our true self, and finally to a new definition and objective of curriculum theory:



Referring to this stone tablet image with the idea of curriculum theory in mind, it represents, in my view, a nice ‘mental starting place’ for lack of a better term, for our joyous child to *start* the learning process and grow up to be an adult; hence the words ‘babies are such a nice way to start people’.

But what this tablet is also inferring, correctly in my view, that something, somehow goes wrong when she grows up; in other words, she *started out* in a nice way, but does not end up in a nice way. Why else the need for this tablet? My claim, now, is that what goes wrong is that curriculum theory develops our wondrous child into an *autonomous* human being; a future enabler and supporter of neoliberalism with its many pernicious tentacles; especially social exclusion.

Let’s return to the question of the *source* of our child’s happiness. According to Wink (1992) from his great spiritual work: *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Marx was right to stress that the self is the ‘ensemble of social relations’. Wink also argues that as far as the self is concerned, there is more to it; much more, than what Marx claimed and it is that much more that is the clue to its profundity. He said plainly that the self is that ensemble of social relations which *also* knows itself to be primordially grounded in being-itself, to have a name uttered over it, or within it, from all eternity. “No state, or family or employee can reach all the way to the core of our beings; and it is this residual irreducibility of the self to the social that makes it possible to resist society, to oppose the Powers, to transcend our own socialization” (p. 75). I argue that Wink’s eternal part of the self that is *unreachable* by anyone, is the source of our child’s happiness. It is unreachable because of the complexity of her mind described earlier.

Since we are using a *spiritual* analysis to comply with Einstein’s wisdom that different thinking is needed to solve our problems, and Rudolph Otto telling us that logic and reason alone are inadequate to answer our deeper questions and Howard (1991) telling us that non-rational thinking is a means to increase human understanding, I boldly put forth the following scripture as illuminating the source of our child’s happiness. It comes from Proverbs Chapter 8 Verses 22,23 & 30,31 (NIV):

The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works,  
before his deeds of old; I was appointed *from eternity*, from  
the beginning, before the world began.

Then I was the craftsman at his side. **I was filled with  
delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence,  
rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.**

(I add my own emphasis)

First, I say Amen. Notice how these sacred words precisely reflect Wink's definition of an eternal part of the self that he infers Marx was missing. I say forthrightly with confidence and clarity of mind that this scripture describes the *source* of our child's happiness and that of *all* children. In other words, I am claiming their incredible happiness is due to them just recently coming from a 'place' or 'state' of pure joy where they *were filled with delight and rejoiced all the time in His presence while delighting in mankind!!* I say plainly: **this delight and rejoicing is what they know before learning anything our world has to teach them!** This is why the tablet is correct in stating that babies are such a nice way to start people. As proof, admittedly circumstantial, we often see infants smiling at us with a wide toothless grin that melts our hearts in just a matter of weeks after birth; sometimes even sooner! Good grief, since they don't know anything, where can that infectious smile possibly come from?

Logic and reason return to us as we can now evaluate the merit or lack thereof of this scripture. In other words, we have a possible answer to our question(s): what is our true self independent of any application of it, and what is the source of children's unique level of happiness, not having anything we adults have that make us happy. I answer this plainly:

**It is our original existence with God before He created  
the world where we rejoiced always in His presence and  
in mankind that now makes up the eternal part of the  
self that is unreachable by anyone.**

As a disclaimer, I am not a biblical scholar, and there is much detail about the various interpretive renderings, such as who is speaking to who in this scripture, that will not be discussed, as they are out of scope with this article. This scripture is not part of a sermon and certainly not intended to proselytize in any manner. I am using it here in a very targeted way following a very specific line of observations of mine to search for a possible definition of what our true self is. Recall Schmitt-Stegmann (1997) told us the goal of the Waldorf curriculum is to 'unlock the true potential living in each child, the true Self'. Other authors used this idea of the true self as a core component of authenticity.

In a very, very critical note, I happen to be a Christian, which is why I used scripture from the Bible to conduct my analysis. I would bet my life that an equally valid analysis can be grounded in other sacred texts such as the Muslim Qur'an, the Jewish Torah, the Buddhist Pāli Canon, etc. This spiritual analysis is about a truth not the truth. I cannot overemphasize this point lest readers use it to pit Christianity against the other religions thereby completely wiping away everything this article is trying to convey.

## The Great Relay Race: Constructing a New Curriculum Theory

In our initial use of these spiritual findings, recall our young girl in the park tale whose extreme and pure happiness is otherwise completely inexplicable. I say it provides possible answers to why our child is so incredibly happy not having anything we adults have that makes us happy. Also, why they do not need to be taught about other humans and why we do not need to teach them to come to us in a loving embrace. It answers why they smile at a stranger and often want to share something they may have with them. We have all seen these things many, many times in children and know them to be true.

Furthermore, this scripture explains the tablet's words that babies are such a nice way to start people. But it does *not* address the tablet's inference that something goes wrong, terribly wrong in my view, when our children grow up and become part of society. The dangerously fragile and increasingly violent state of our fractured world confirms this beyond a shadow of a doubt for me. Recall I claim we are **taught** to think, believe and behave as we do; we were not *created* that way; as our scripture clearly infers.

I now present a common sports metaphor to connect our spiritual investigation to the objective of this article in hopes of making it more meaningful, clearer and relevant. I argue the proper job of a new curriculum theory should be like that of a two-person relay race where the second runner, curriculum theory, **grabs the baton from the first runner**, our joyous child, or *any* child, with their now understood God-given joyous nature to celebrate mankind, to develop them to become **authentic** human beings. But, what do I mean by this?

Tragically, curriculum theory today, to my mind, **intentionally drops the baton from the first runner**, our joyous child, and instead grabs her and runs in a far different race to develop her into an autonomous human being to support the neoliberal ideology of our time. Recall Koutselini (1997) provided an historical view of curriculum theory that shows its objective has *always* been to support the ideology of the time; indicating the revolutionary nature of our new curriculum theory. Keirl (2015) asks: are curricula working from vision-led orientations of sustainable global futures or are they consolidating the destructive status quo? If neoliberalism is the worsening global problem of the last thirty-plus years then orthodox curricula are part of that problem. In addition, recall the quote from Brook (2009) where he said: 'Heidegger formulates education in its proper sense as the formation of authenticity'. He adds that in this respect, authenticity or what we now refer to as our 'true self', signifies being truly human which is the genuine or proper *telos* of human existence. As a complementary add-on, he seems to agree quite strongly with the inference of the stone tablet that something goes very wrong after our children grow up and become part of society: babies start out in a nice place but do not end up in a nice place, is how I interpreted that inference. Accordingly, Brook says that 'Heidegger also claims that humans have a primordial tendency to fall away from our own being, or, that our everyday way of existence is to not be ourselves'. Recall Zinkin (2008) asks: what could be more important than becoming who one truly is?"

From all this, I argue as strong as I can that the job of our new curriculum theory is the development of authentic human beings by '**grabbing the baton**' from the joyous and celebratory nature of our true self and running the race towards creating a better society.



This article, searching for a new curriculum theory, was intended to provide *different thinking* on the subject for the reader to assess its possible value or lack thereof. It concludes that our children, and of course us, were *created* to be joyful, celebratory, good, kind, happy, unique, loving, spiritual, etc. as opposed to being violent, greedy, racist, sexist, analytic, separate, etc.; all the things I adamantly claim we had to be taught. The scripture tells us plainly that **‘we all rejoiced in mankind even before the world was created’**. As Rudolph Otto tell us, logic and reason alone could not possibly have reached this conclusion and because Howard (1991) tells us the non-rational can increase human knowledge, I have confidence that most readers will sense its value and possible truth, regardless of one’s own faith or lack thereof. Furthermore, who would dare claim that curriculum theory today is designed to acknowledge these spiritual findings? This article argues that today, it is quite the opposite; putting our future as a society in grave doubt. But, how do we use these spiritual findings?

Of course, no one can describe that joyful existence the scripture speaks about, but I say there is one thing we can safely extract and interpret from it: human beings acting together in a joyous celebration of mankind *as our nature*; i.e., the way we were all created. In other words, **togetherness and celebration**, not separateness and selfishness, is our very nature *before we learn anything*. I say with vigor, hope and certainty that a new curriculum theory needs to stand on this as its epistemological foundation.

While out of scope with this article, I nevertheless need to at least mention very briefly and with significant oversimplification, this new curriculum theory connects directly to the Zohar & Marshall (1994) book: *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics and a New Social Vision* where they explain quantum basics to non-physicists like me and I suppose many of you. According to them, reality is indeterminate as opposed to Newton’s now outdated deterministic reality. Extending this understanding leads us to the genesis of modernity’s ‘either/or’ thinking paradigm that I argue is, in the final analysis, the true root cause of many of society’s great problems that are rapidly pushing us towards catastrophe. Consider two great examples: 1- the ‘either’ Democrats ‘or’ Republican thinking dynamic that has our great country nearly paralyzed and 2- the even *far more* dangerous: ‘either’ God is on my side ‘or’ your side with the thought that He is on BOTH sides unthinkable. I argue 9/11 was a spectacularly tragic manifestation of this outdated thinking. In short, our scripture with the above **‘and/both’** thinking embedded in quantum science, positions our understanding of life on an entirely new platform. *Combined*, they represent a new epistemology for us all, in my opinion.

Referring once again to our spiritual sports metaphor, I am arguing that the new goal of curriculum theory should be to ‘grab the baton’ from our common human nature to celebrate mankind and **prioritize social development over our ability to quantify things**. I cannot emphasize this enough as the new foundation.

This new understanding of curriculum theory thus helps to construct, through the development of the human mind, a society where ALL God’s children; young and old, black and white, men and women, rich and poor, Christians and Muslims, feel like *celebrating for merely being alive*. Consider how far we are from this ideal today where isolation, hate, distrust, division, competition and confrontation are embedded in the very way we think! As a bonus, and this may give some readers a sigh of relief, we will see that this does in no way reject our

technological world, but instead actually *embraces* the use of technology to improve the human condition.

### *Principles of a New Curriculum Theory*

Building on our new foundation, Rogoff (1990) in her masterful book: *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*, captures the essence of our new curriculum theory succinctly. She argues that today, the 'analytic priority' given to the individual and to the universal has resulted in an inability to address sociocultural forces in a principled, fundamental way. In addition, she tells us that most contemporary analyses of children's cognitive development are grounded in the assumption that the role of social and cultural factors can be understood only *after* we have created a basic and universalistic analysis of mental functioning in the individual. I say her research and thinking is absolutely outstanding and sums up much of what our spiritual critique of curriculum theory attempts to convey. In short, an elevation of the social i.e., understanding ourselves and others, *over* the technical, i.e., our ability to quantify things. To repeat, in the end, the technical will, in our new curriculum theory, be used to better the social and not the other way around as it is today.

We also have Nelson & Fivush (2004) with their article: *The Emergence of Autobiographical Memory: A Social Cultural Developmental Theory*, that lends support to our spiritual findings. In defining what autobiographical memory is, the reader can see that it connects with the above thoughts of Rogoff that dismisses the high priority of quantitative analysis; especially for our young:

Autobiographical memory is memory for the events of one's life. It constitutes a major crossroads in human cognition where considerations relating to the self, emotion, goals, and personal meanings all intersect (Conway & Rubin, 1993, p. 103). This definition differentiates autobiographical memory as memory for events, in **distinction from memory of other kinds of content such as facts or lists, or skills, such as how to ride a bicycle**. (p. 487, emphasis added)

They too, elevate the social over the technical.

In adding a bit more specificity to the importance of elevating social development over technical skills in our new curriculum theory, Spence (2003) claims there is now considerable evidence that social skill deficits are integral to many emotional and behavioral problems. It is not a stretch to see this as especially prevalent in urban schools where the environment of many of these kids is far less than desirable. "There are a huge number of social tasks that young people need to be able to deal with, such as requesting help, offering assistance, saying 'no', requesting information, asking to join in, and offering invitations, to mention just a few" (p. 85). It is clear, at least to me, that there can be little if any 'common rejoicing in mankind' until these social deficiencies are corrected. In other words, our new curriculum theory must prioritize this. Adding to this, Webster-Stratton & Reid (2004) claim "evidence suggests that without early intervention, emotional, social, and behavioral problems in young children are key risk factors or "red flags" that mark the beginning of escalating academic problems, grade retention, school drop-out, and antisocial behavior" (p. 97). McClelland, Morrison & Holmes (2000) tell us "the

early acquisition of social skills and particularly work-related skills prior to school entry is very important” (p. 326).

As we continue with a new curriculum theory’s need to elevate and prioritize the social over the technical, a truncated discussion on teaching mathematics *as a distinct discipline* should help solidify our case. The following line of thinking, like many of the thoughts in this article, deserves an entire separate study. Nevertheless, it must be included as it adds tremendous secular insight to our spiritual findings:

Llewellyn (2012) discusses what she refers to as the ‘Holy Grail’ of mathematics education. In her powerful article she deconstructs, in Foucauldian fashion, mathematics education that I argue has very specific implications for urban schools in this age of neoliberalism. She comes out of her corner swinging. In her unpacking what it means to teach mathematics, she asks: what happens when teachers state that they want to understand or that they wish to teach for understanding? “What is it they want and what work does this do? And, what if their and our quest for understanding is a masquerade for something else?” (p.386).

Her argument is that a **preoccupation with mathematics education forecloses other stories**. She claims that mathematics education promotes what she refers to as a ‘romantic’ discourse of mathematical understanding which draws on a normalized developing child as self-governing and free thinking. (Recall our discussion on autonomous human beings developed to support and sustain neoliberalism) Next, she argues that a teacher cannot explain to her students the principles underlying the multiplication algorithm if she does not explicitly understand them herself. But whatever her level of understanding, it is ascribed as one-dimensional and cognitive such that the nature, superiority and good of understanding are all taken for granted and assumed. However, within academic literature, there are several *versions of understanding* that exist and are classified by various constructions from low to high. Here is the key: whatever her specific classification, all have in common the notion of the ‘normative cognitive child’, i.e., a child that can produce *real* understanding, and it is that such understanding that causes ‘real’ attainment. This fictional version of the child, she argues, has become common sense.

Given this, what does it mean to our new curriculum theory? This is where it gets really interesting. Modern theories of cognition, she points out, have taken as their central plank to be that reasoning is a centralized process, occurring on the basis of a naturalistic path of development, itself **guaranteed by a structural model of thinking and of the world**. This view takes some of its impetus from Descartes and from Kant and has become, once more, an almost common-sense wisdom. Fine, but what is the connection to our new curriculum theory?

The child is always already a normalized developing child, one that is self-governing and free thinking. Normalization, a process that encourages a specific version of the "normal" that subsequently becomes taken for granted or "natural" (Foucault, 1977, 1978), is installed and propagated by discourse (Carabine, 2001). In addition, it functions in a particular way within neoliberalism, the current policy regime defined by "the progressive enlargement of the territory of the market" (du Gay, 1996, p. 56).

**Neoliberalism normalizes a particular model of selfhood as autonomous** (Rose, 1999). (p.387, emphasis added)

Here, we have our connection. First, it clearly synchs with our discussion on what autonomous human beings are and that mathematics education plays a central role in their development. Referring one last time to our spiritual sports metaphor, I argue that mathematics *as a separate distinct discipline*, particularly to the very young, ‘**is where the baton gets dropped**’ and we develop their minds on a path of autonomy and not authenticity. And we do this in such a way as to make it seem natural and common sense.

In her concluding remarks Llewellyn (2012) argues that in teaching mathematics “I am not saying that there is something wrong with teaching for understanding, but instead I suggest that its value should not be seen as a common-sense piece of truth, something that is inherently good and always the best-case scenario” (p. 396). I could not agree more and use this to argue two things concerning content in our new curriculum theory: 1- mathematics *as a separate distinct discipline* should not be taught until 5<sup>th</sup> grade for most and not until high school for some and that 2- beginning basic mathematics principles should instead be taught *through* social development. Pedagogical experts can devise methods to do this. The intent here is to prioritize social and cultural knowledge and skills **first** so that when we introduce mathematics as a separate discipline, our rejoicing nature and understanding of ourselves, each other and our environment is already well developed. In this way, I argue, mathematics and technology may be understood and yearned for in our young as means to a better humanity; not human exclusion and material maximization.

### *Ending Images*

Since this article is developed from many different ideas, theories, disciplines; both technical and spiritual, there is not enough space to capture them all adequately. To address this shortcoming, I present two images; a before and after, so to speak, that I believe coalesces all the thinking used to develop this new theory of curriculum.

This first image visualizes current curriculum theory as it develops autonomous human beings as its objective:



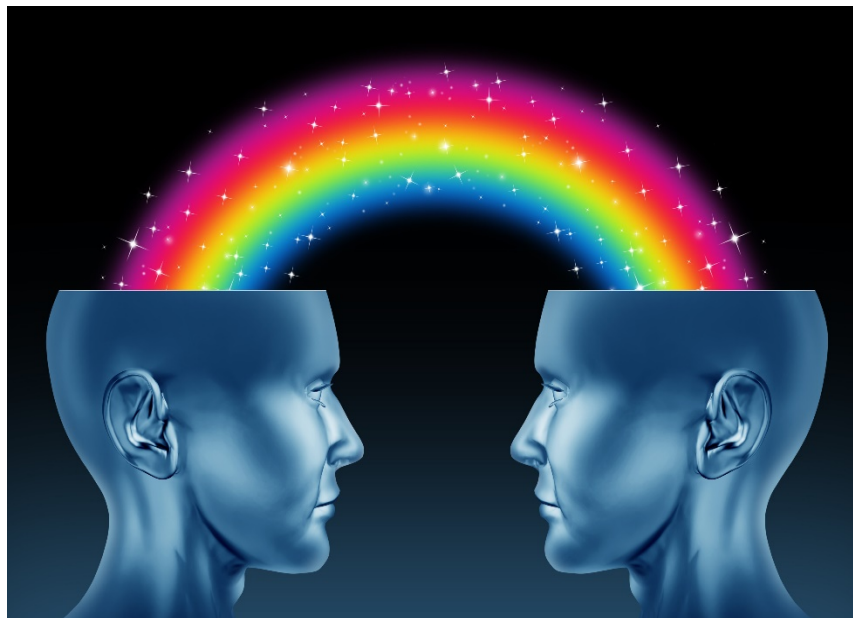
In this image, the outdated Newtonian understanding of reality creates the ‘either/or’ way of thinking where logic and reason alone creates a *singular truth for her*. There is little to no room for the spiritual. She is an autonomous human being **intentionally developed that way** to

support, sustain and expand the profit maximization edict of neoliberalism. She is independent, separate, self-sufficient, highly analytical and selfish. She is always calculating, always considering new ways to increase her wealth. I state plainly that this image is a picture of what I argue is wrong with our modern society in general. It, via curriculum theory, positions us for catastrophe. How so?

The main problem with this image, as I see it, is that it **automatically** means ever increasing social exclusion. There is absolutely no way around that; as it is dictated by the basic mathematics that grounds neoliberalism. *Who* to exclude now becomes an easy choice of the dominant class where racism and sexism take center stage. Add to this, Beinhocker (2006) in his important and extensive book: *The Origin of Wealth: The Radical Remaking of Economics and What It Means for Business and Society*, uses the lens of evolution to evaluate historical global wealth creation to show that without a doubt, we are on an unsustainable trajectory where catastrophe seems the only logical conclusion.

In this image of current curriculum theory, **mathematics leads her development before she fully understands herself, others and the environment she exists in.** It represents the psychic essence of modernity and my strong objection to those who argue, for whatever reasons, that we are now in a postmodern world. I say passionately that we are not and add that is actually very dangerous to insist that we are. We are in an expanding neoliberal world still steeped in modernity; I am absolutely certain of that.

Our New Curriculum Theory:



Recall our wonderfully happy child in the park tale and our ensuing argument that says with the trillions of neural synapses that make up her mind, we have absolutely no way of knowing what she may be thinking **unless she decides to share her thoughts with us.** Also, I argue with certainty that most if not all of you, have changed your mind about someone, often drastically from bad to good or the reverse, *once you go to know them.* From that, this article

argues that *not knowing each other* is at the heart of conflict everywhere; from small disputes among friends and coworkers to nations at war. To my mind, using advanced technology without *first* understand ourselves, others and our environment, is very, very dangerous.

### *Final Remarks*

In this article, Albert Einstein advises us to use *new thinking* if we are to solve our problems, while Rudolph Otto told us that logic and reason alone are inadequate to answer our deepest questions. Standing on their shoulders, a spiritual analysis was used that concluded that authentic humans were created to be joyful, celebratory, together, kind, interdependent, loving etc.; as opposed to the autonomous humans in the first image of being separate, independent, selfish, analytical and confrontational. This spiritual conclusion, which represents a new epistemology, provided the grounds for a new curriculum theory. Its new objective is to develop our young into **authentic**, as opposed to autonomous, human beings. The hope-filled societal impact of this radical and revolutionary change is the movement away from extreme consumerism, exclusion and materialism and towards a far more inclusive society. Zohar and Marshall (1994) define such a society as ‘a free-form dance company, with each member a soloist in his or her own right but moving creatively in harmony with the others’.

These above images represent the before and after of our article. It hopefully addresses, theoretically in the long run, the following: Most realize our world is in deep trouble and that an entirely new direction is called for. We also know that we do not have forever to change direction, as the pace of life is now hyper-accelerated to the point where we are clearly in a chaotic world; literally. Technically speaking, a chaotic world means that a small once thought insignificant local event can cause tremendous and unpredictable ramifications globally. Sounds like an overreach? Consider this: recently there was a small unknown preacher in Florida with a congregation of around fifty people. He decided that his Christian faith called for a complete rejection of Islam. He publicly proclaimed that he would hold a ‘burn the Quran day’. With the tensions in the middle east and with the power of social media to show this act around the world *in real time* our senior military officers personally went to him to convince him, an insignificant pastor of fifty, not to hold this event as it could have ignited unprecedented and uncontrolled violence around the world. Clearly, we do not have forever to change direction.

There are no magic bullets. Nothing will change overnight. This new theory of curriculum is part one of a two-part solution I am presenting to change the future of urban education; where the parts together like software and hardware. This article presented the software. The hardware answers *where* will this new curriculum theory be implemented? In a public, private or charter school? As the British might say, not bloody likely! Where then? *And why there?*

This article assumes the unfortunate claim that urban education, *currently situated in externally controlled organizations*, is broken beyond repair because it cannot be isolated from a broken society. This leads us to the doorstep of the **Tolton Bank**®, a revolutionary structural concept in urban education named after Father Augustus Tolton, the first black priest in the United States. This is *where* our new curriculum theory will be implemented and grow; offering a far different future for urban students and the communities they exist in. It is a vision I claim will be a new beacon for society, like a light shining in the dark.

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