Let the conversations continue

A rejoinder to the review "The quest for magnanimity: Tensions and paradoxes"

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We welcome the decision of the editors of this special issue (SI) of the *Journal of Education* to publish one review in the form of a response alongside our article. We support transparent peer review, which is not new to the field of Curriculum Studies and was experimented with when the journal *Transnational Curriculum Inquiry* (TCI) was first introduced (see Gough 2004). When reviews are published alongside articles, both authors and reviewers are held accountable, it minimises unethical conduct, and eliminates the protection of incompetent reviewers (Le Grange, 2009). More recently, a process of semi-open review was experimented with in a SI of the *South African Journal of Higher Education* and the editors noted that a transparent and affirmative approach to peer review is attuned to posthumanism, enabling us to "think-and-do-with/together" (Du Preez et al., 2023, p. 3).

The context of our article was to give an account of the work of the Curriculum Studies Special Interest Group (CSSIG) as a contribution to the SAERA 10th anniversary special issue of the *Journal of Education*. We account in two ways: first, we tell our story as core members of the CSSIG; second, we are accountable to SAERA and the broader education community for the work that we have done. However, our aim was not merely to present narratives and be accountable, but to trace how a relational scholarly assemblage like this Special Interest Group (SIG) came about and how it performed its work. SIGs are commonplace in education associations around the world and the work they perform is crucial to advancing knowledge in their respective sub-fields of education. Yet, the work and making of SIGs is rarely written about. Documenting the work of a SIG in a fledgling association such as SAERA is not only important for archival purposes but also for what we can learn from the work performed. Our article provided at least four insights from which we can learn. Leadership is crucial to sustaining a SIG and organic rather appointed leadership is productive. What SIGs become/achieve are outcomes of material arrangements and not only the will of the people (the SIG was galvanised, and its membership grew because of the use of platforms like Zoom during and post COVID-19). SIGs can be comprised of diverse people with diverse ideas but members need to be committed to the ethical imperative to advance the particular field. These learnings can be gleaned by the education community and therein lies the contribution of the article. Moreover, as the response acknowledges, the article contributes to re/thinking how we do curriculum work and the very understanding of what is called curriculum. The fourth insight is that the article provides some evidence of the evolution from a predominantly humanist conceptualisation of the SIG as a formation of networked individuals, akin to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), towards a posthumanist scholarly assemblage of human and more-than-human actants, an orientation that recognises existing (curriculum) scholarship but resists revering pre-eminent theories (and theorists). Our article is not an attempt to trace the evolution of the field of Curriculum Studies. What it does is contribute to the field of scholarly formations or assemblages as we prefer to name it—an organic, fluid assemblage of actants whose ontology is relational, dynamic, and subject to constant slippage *en route* to becoming.

We thank Michael Samuel for his response which is comprised of pointed comments and his willingness to be part of a complicated conversion that has no beginning or end. We were also privy to the prose report of an anonymous reviewer to which we will make reference in

this rejoinder. We trust that Samuel's response and our rejoinder might open rather than close the conversations on the making of SIGs and on the broader field of Curriculum Studies in South Africa.

Given the limitation of space, we will reply to the response article in broad terms. But first, we offer clarification concerning the "core members" of the CSSIG. The core members are the folk who have attended SIG meetings and activities regularly over the years. Upon recognising this, they agreed to work together to contribute to the field through the work of the SIG. The context is that SAERA SIGs are not well-established, and participation is generally low. So, unless individuals or teams take up the responsibility to drive SIG activities the SIGs cease to be functional. We acknowledge that there are no social processes in which power is not at play. Power, however, is never static and has the potential to be negative and/or positive, changing forms and taking on a hegemonic life of its own (Foucault, 2008). According to Du Preez et al. (2022), the negative form of power, *potestas*, is hierarchical, colonising, and imposed from the outside. This form of unfreedom (*potestas*) is often contrasted with *potentia*[1] which is an immanent power, a productive power that connects and advances life. As members of the core group, we attempted to invigorate lines of connection between and among our individual/collective past/s, present/s, and future/s, to encourage collaborative leadership and to find ways in which we were able to respond to issues that were immanently present glocally. We contend that these were manifestations of *potentia* at work. But *potentia* can always become *potestas* and vice-versa. And so, *potestas* would also have been present both in the encounters of the core group, the latter's engagement with the broader SIG, and the broader SAERA community. For example, some members of the core group found that certain voices dominated its work and that other voices were marginalised. The CSSIG has also been perceived as an exclusive club by some SAERA members and some have, in jest, referred to the core group as a curriculum mafia. The making of this SIG, as is the case in the performance of all scholarly work, is messy and is characterised by heterogeneity, contradictions, and indeterminacy.

Concerning the CSSIG's relation to the broader field, we agree that it does not represent the field of Curriculum Studies and is only a slice of the field. But this situation is an indictment of the field, and, we argue, is one reason why the field is weak. The anonymous reviewer contested our claim that the field was weak, making reference to the presence of "preeminent scholars" of the field. We do not know who these "preeminent scholars" are but can assume who some of them might be. We wish to point out, however, that preeminent scholars in the South African context and their acolytes have been conspicuously absent at SAERA CSSIG meetings and have not contributed to the several open calls to SIs of journals of which the guest editors were SIG members. One exception is Viv Bozalek who challenged the focus (on uncertain times) of one of the SIs for which the CSSIG was responsible, when she argued for indeterminate times instead. This enriched our understanding of Curriculum Studies in the posthuman condition/posthuman Curriculum Studies. We also agree that there are contestations within the broader field of Curriculum Studies in SA, but these contestations do

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1   These Latin words *potentia* and *potestas* are now commonly used in academic literature to distinguish between the two forms of power.

not manifest in the CSSIG because the contestants are not present. Le Grange's (2014, p. 466) words ring true, "Complicated conversations on curriculum matters between South Africans rarely occur (at home)—although I have observed some of the more difficult and heated conversations between South African education scholars occurring on foreign soil." Curriculum work does, of course, not only happen in a SIG of an association. What the field in SA does not need is preeminent scholars who are celebrity professors, globe trotters who deliver hit-and-run keynote addresses, who are never part of the education community, and who are not willing to listen to its rhythm and heartbeat.

Nevertheless, the CSSIG provides a critical space. Robust and complicated conversations need to happen in this space if we are to advance the field in South Africa. We disagree with the response that we are "commenting on the previously dominant versions of psychology which pigeonholed identity as a stable entity trait. More recent offerings of identities (plural/ multiple) studies are resonant with the authors' viewpoints of fluidity, impermanence and responsive complexity." In thinking with posthumanism, we endorse dis/identification with any form of identity politics (Braidotti, 2013), even the "more recent offerings" as suggested in the response. Dis/identification with identity politics (as explained in our article) is a necessary part of the posthuman critique levelled against the ideal of human or man as the measure of all things. In our intra-actions, we acknowledge that scholarly assemblages are messy and indeterminate, and that despite the best intentions to dis/identify with humanism and static identity markers, we are socialised in particular ways that often reveal slippages. For example, our intention was not to use theory in a reductionist way or to epistemologically sanitise any of our arguments. That being said, we do not deny slippages in our attempts to theorise (as a verb) since we acknowledge the extent to which we have been colonised by humanist thinking and doing. To challenge this way in which we have been colonised, we show in this article that theory as a verb is always the outcome of intra-action and not something transcendent, abstract, external, or predeterminate that researchers use *a priori* to foreground and shape their research.

The anonymous reviewer suggested that our article is an amalgam of "part manifesto, and part CV of a grouping, whose status is unclear." We hope both a re/reading of our article and our rejoinder will make our status clear. Moreover, we infer that the reviewer's statement was not meant to be complimentary. However, we shall be contrarian and take it to be complimentary because we contend that we should celebrate different genres of scholarly writing as well as combining genres within a single piece. In our work published elsewhere, we have, for example, experimented with figurations such as fugue, improvisational jazz, rhizome, etc. Also, we do not have issues with being out of step or out of rhythm with one another because this is what characterises the rhizomatic assemblage of Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) seminal book, *A thousand plateaus*: *Capitalism and schizophrenia.* We take inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari.

We love that the anonymous reviewer said that our work is part CV (curriculum vitae), because curriculum is embedded in the term. Curriculum in CV is closer to the meaning of the etymological root of curriculum, the Latin word *currere,* which means to run or flow. It is

closer to *currere* than the dominant understanding of curriculum applied in educational institutions that translate this as "course to run", an understanding of curriculum that colonises, normalises, and homogenises (Le Grange, 2021). So, we are comfortable with the idea of curriculum as autobiography as introduced by Pinar (1975) almost 50 years ago. We are also pleased that the anonymous reviewer said that our article was part manifesto. The manifesto is a legitimate genre of scholarly writing. The *Communist Manifesto*, written by Marx and Engels in 1848 has had a significant impact on scholarly work in the domain of critical theory and its education derivative, critical pedagogy. More recently, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (2013) published a scholarly book chapter entitled, *#Accelerate: Manifesto for an accelerationist politics*.

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