

**Book Review**

# A Deleuzian Approach to Curriculum: Essays on a Pedagogical Life (2010)

Jason Wallin

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In the preface of *A Deleuzian Approach to Curriculum: Essays on a Pedagogical Life*, Wallin (2010) states that the work seeks to approach *currere* “as a concept for pedagogical thinking” and is an “exegesis on what *currere* does and might do” (p. ix). The concept of *currere* and the way that Wallin reimagines it will be discussed more in the summary of chapter 1 in this review, but Wallin goes on to describe his mode of analysis as a *thought experiment*, mobilizing “a philosophical passage for thinking pedagogical difference . . .” (p. ix). In an attempt to “root out” what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the *arboreal* modes of thought (rooted, hierarchal), Wallin investigates the mobilization of pedagogical practices and curriculum through “leakages” which are, as Deleuze and Guattari name, *rhizomatic*, *nomadic*, and *schizoanalytic*.

Wallin cites the two primary tasks of the book as:

1. creating “a new lineage for the field of curriculum that is oriented to the problem of difference and multiplicity,” and
2. encouraging the navigation of curriculum scholarship through “new fidelities between hitherto unrelated scholars” (p. x).

The book therefore would be of use for scholars that find curriculum studies and design to be overcoded or those interested in entering into the “problematics of difference” as Wallin calls them. Additionally, this work provides conceptual tools that enable scholars to rethink curriculum as dynamically (dis)organized, to be at ease with the (dis)ease of unconventional images of pedagogy, and to consider the ways that the arts have and continue to oppose power, affirm difference, and dehabituate normalized discourses.

Each chapter in Wallin’s book approaches a reimag(in)ing of curriculum as an active *currere*, calling on Deleuze and Guattari to supply a framework for renegotiating the terrain of curriculum development and pedagogy as productive disruption of hierarchal or transcendent modes of thought. Additionally, each section is accompanied by examples of a visual and performative artist or works of art that Wallin avers provide insight into the practice of a curriculum as an active conceptual force.

Wallin begins chapter 1 by discussing a Deleuze-Guattarian image of concept as a way of approaching a world (in opposition to *the* world) through the “*active* extension of thinking the possible” (p. 1). The etymology of curriculum, notes Wallin, extends from the Latin *currere*, or “to run.” The running, active concept of *currere* is essential to the framework of Wallin’s arguments throughout the book, as the concept of action and flight are essential to the work of

Deleuze and Guattari. Action resists stagnation and opens new lines of flight for creative concepts. This chapter establishes contemporary thought in regard to curriculum as largely a course *to be* run, or a *reactive* image of *currere* as opposed to an *active* image of *currere*, and the need for the making of a *holey* curriculum that resists the course to be run. Put differently, one would think curricular foundations without foundations. Although I do not suggest that this book might only be read linearly, chapter 1 provides a somewhat necessary framework for understanding how Wallin proceeds in the following chapters.

Chapters 2 and 3 also assist the reader in establishing an image of thought regarding curriculum as active. The “traditional” conceptualization of *currere* is marked by transcendence while a more active *currere* is marked by immanence. Immanence, claims Wallin, positions curriculum as changing without being bound by the hierarchal privilege of belonging to a transcendent substance. Wallin complicates the simulacrum as replication, as replication is always marked by difference from a Deleuzian perspective. Any one of us that has attempted to “replicate” curriculum designed by a colleague understands this perspective, and yet many perhaps still cling to the traditional concept of curriculum without embracing the inherent difference present even in the attempts at replication. The unhooking of any mode of thought is a challenging exercise, but one I believe Wallin provides ample points of access to.

In chapters 4 through 9, Wallin performs those points of access by supplying the reader with the language of a Deleuze-Guattarian approach to curriculum, as well as examples of how the arts arrive at those access points. I note that the use of language is especially important, as a Deleuze-Guattarian use of language was my own entry point to embracing difference as Deleuze and Guattari describe it. I struggled (and perhaps continue to struggle) with notions of minor languages, experiencing nomadism, and the like because these languages go against the ways many of us have been conditioned to think. By introducing this language and concretizing it somewhat in the context of (a) film, (b) music, (c) performance, (d) visual art, and (e) even the art of computer hacking long enough for a resistant mind to become uprooted, Wallin sets in motion a creative line of flight in imagining an active *currere*.

I find particularly compelling Wallin’s analysis of Jim Jarmusch’s (1995) film *Dead Man*. Wallin avers that Jarmusch’s film departs from the traditional image of the Western, rendering “the familiar coordinates” of the genre strange. The terrain is plotted, somewhat recognizable, but the film does not follow the map of the Western in terms of story, a collective understanding of the “hero,” or a particular linearity that comforts, but does not challenge. Admittedly, this example resonates with me somewhat because of my love affair with all things Jarmusch. But I also assert that it stands as one of many illuminating examples of Wallin’s articulated tasks of the book. He says, “Like the rhizomatic connections of Jarmusch’s (1995) film, *currere*’s active force deterritorializes the often debilitating illusion of the curriculum as a self-enclosed document or route/root to be traced” (p. 51).

I consider Wallin’s collection of what he calls *Essays on a Pedagogical Life* to be a profound contribution to any field of study that grapples with the complexities of putting theory into practice. For those familiar with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, perhaps there exists some tension in the interstitial spaces created by a dynamic image of Deleuze-Guattarian thought and its usefulness in praxis. This book attempts to relieve some of that tension by positioning the arts as having the potential to set in motion an active, as opposed to the traditional reactive, *currere*.

## References

MacBride, D. J. (Producer), & Jarmusch, J. (Director). (1995). *Dead man* [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax Films.

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