

Foreword¹

William F. Pinar

Since the field's inception in the United States, students of the curriculum have suggested that, whatever the curriculum may be, it is not the syllabus. Asserting the syllabus *as* curriculum, implying its centrality, even equivalence, to curriculum, upends one hundred years of curriculum theorizing in the United States and Canada.

That's where Sam Rocha starts. In the syllabus he writes – here composed during different semesters for different courses – there is stimulus to be sure, but also response, as he anticipates lived experience by incorporating it, making content existential. Through the syllabus he addresses a U.S. field marred by the making of dramatic (evermore “radical”) accusations (“epistemicide” would be one), an unconscious compulsion to appear to be “on the cutting edge,” always (it seems) declaring what is done as “new” (which, by its sheer repetitiveness, becomes awfully old). Rather than advancing the field overall, there are those who back themselves into a (identity) corner where they complain about their (tenured) marginality, accusing others (presumably not on the margins, whom they dimly discern across a vast if vacated common space) of various crimes: racism, sexism, classism. (May I add ageism?) A curriculum commons – curriculum studies as public space, inclusive, intercultural, politically united in our common cause – has gone missing.

Sam Rocha will have none of this. A person first, a teacher second, a philosopher of education and curriculum theorist third (one could say he does curriculum theory philosophically, specifically phenomenologically), Rocha radicalizes by preserving knowledge, reworking ancient wisdom through his – our - time and place. He emphasizes not “the new” (complicit as that obsession is with consumer capitalism and the mindless consumption of “new” products) but the

old (Plato for instance). No exploiting of ancestors' suffering for present professional gain for Rocha; indeed, he seems to suspend his Mexican -American "brown" interpellation almost altogether, engaging Augustine, William James, and many others whose *ideas* are what matters, not their anatomies.

It is precisely the ancestors Rocha honors by his remembrance of them – after all, the book is dedicated to his *abuelita* – and by his ongoing intellectual engagement with them, acknowledging the persistence of the past in the present, a past from which we may never become free, a rebuke to that now almost-dry stream of progressive thought (co-opted enthusiastically by corporations) that constant "change" is what we're about, plunging ahead (come-what-may) into a future presumably more profitable and pleasurable, materialized by ever-new devices and other technological "breakthroughs." Rocha remembers is there is something not so malleable about us, that there is (however complex and contested) a human condition, that phrase staring at us from its assertion a century ago.² Through the syllabus, Rocha returns the gaze.

The syllabus emphasizes knowledge Rocha deems of most worth, assigning "process" to at least second place, although you'll note that Sam's style is hardly unmindful of itself. He is, after all, also a songwriter and singer - a strong sense of the "performative" structures his scholarship and teaching: creative, original, self-expressive, attuned to his predecessors and to those in his midst. Content is king: Sam emphasizes classic texts – yes, the canon – complicated by other (including contemporary) texts critical of that canon (conspicuously Freire, if here accurately translated). Conceived as a song, sung in his singular voice, the syllabus (as essay, as outline) contains within it - as it conveys - the complicated conversation curriculum is, rescuing it from cacophony by his clarity, conviction, and commitment.

Rocha recovers intentionality from an eviscerated phenomenology (so-called "post-intentional" phenomenology) that has renounced it; he adds not yet another "post," but the

adjective “folk” to affirm phenomenology’s sociality, politicality, musicality. Rocha reaffirms our humanity as others proclaim proudly (accurately if perversely) we are now “post-human.” In doing so, Rocha renders the teacher subjectively present as a *person* who accepts his or her ethical responsibilities as pedagogue. You’ll not find him hiding behind once progressive now only evasive conceptions of teacher as “facilitator.” Nor does he hide behind “identity.” Rocha puts *himself* on the line. A particular person, existing here and now, encoded in his syllabus: you’ll discover no death of the subject here. Indeed, the author is very much alive; Rocha’s book even accords the teacher the status of *auteur*: self-expressive even stipulating, insisting on students’ engagement, negating the know-nothingness of the anti-canon - the everything is (only) political - crowd. Sam knows that ideas exceed politics (and that holy trinity: race, class, and gender), even as they are associated with each. *What* knowledge is of most worth is the key curriculum question, not *whose* knowledge. That imposter is a film-noir-like question that installs a crime that - cleansed by (an uncritical) “criticality” – the scholar-as-detective presumably can solve. It’s in black-and-white all right, as in simplistic not stunningly shaded. There has been a crime committed all right, but it not the one you were fooled into believing. You’re not watching Bogart and Bacall, but reading Sam Rocha you just might find yourself awaking from “The Big Sleep.”

Yes, all in a syllabus. See for yourself.

¹ Foreword to *The Syllabus as Curriculum: A Reconceptualist Approach*, by Samuel D. Rocha. Routledge, 2020.

² I am thinking of Malraux’s 1933 novel, but Arendt too espoused the phrase: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/H/bo29137972.html>