

UCLA

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies

Title

Editors' Note

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2vv1k7vx>

Journal

InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, 3(1)

ISSN

1548-3320

Authors

Calderone, Shannon
Collins, Christopher
Meeker, Stacey
[et al.](#)

Publication Date

2007-03-08

DOI

10.5070/D431000590

Peer reviewed

“Thought in contradiction must become more negative and more utopian in opposition to the status quo” (Herbert Marcuse, 1968)

What does it mean to be critical? More importantly perhaps, what does “being critical” look like? Use of the term within the social sciences can be, at times, enigmatic, diffuse, tendentious, or even idiomatic. At the theoretical level, a critical approach has been reasoned as part of an on-going confrontation with the growing contradictions of modernity in which resolution rests upon a utopian vision for what could be (Kellner, 1989). This struggle has been most commonly expressed via critiques over the symbiotic rise of modernity and late capitalism, the undying belief in universal truth at the expense of subjectivity, and the role of human agency in the wake of structural constraint.

At the heart of this pursuit, we would argue, is a desire for truth. Truth, as Foucault (1984) states, is characterized by five important traits.

“Truth” is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (“ideological” struggles) (pgs. 131-132).

Any pursuit of truth, according to Foucault, is a fundamentally discursive struggle mediated by the production and consumption of power. As such, truth seeking is fundamentally dialectical, contentious, and requires sufficient space in order to engage with the explicit and implicit contradictions of our social world.

We see *InterActions* as just such a space. As a journal committed to critical inquiry, our mandate is to revisit the question posed above: What does “being critical” look like? Our response is an obvious one. As observers of this social world, scholars, researchers, practitioners, and activists within the education and information studies fields should represent a first line of defense in isolating the contradictions of the “status quo” (borrowing from Marcuse above) and deciphering the pathologies of injustice and privilege with an eye to finding potential correctives. How might a journal support these endeavors? It does so by remaining open to creativity that intentionally counters conventionality, by maintaining accessibility to a wide range of audiences both within and outside the academy, and by serving as a space for confrontation, resistance, and perhaps reconciliation.

This issue continues our tradition of engaging in meaningful critical inquiry. In keeping with our commitments to highlighting scholarship that intersects across education and information studies domains, we begin by presenting Robert Rhoads' piece in which he offers powerful commentary on what he calls a new form of militarism imposed by the Bush administration. Reasoned as an essential strategy in the post-9/11 assault on terrorism, the Bush administration has taken unprecedented license in their attempts to limit the social and cultural criticism often found within the academy. Rhoads convincingly argues that this assault not only threatens to undermine the principles of academic freedom, a fundamental cornerstone in the production of knowledge, but also marks a point of retreat from the American university's historically democratic mission.

As a cross-disciplinary complement to Rhoads' work, we present Marco Codebo's paper, "*The Dossier Novel: (Post)Modern Fiction and the Discourse of the Archive*," in which he seeks to conceptually merge two seemingly disparate forms of information organizing: the archive and the novel. Codebo draws interesting parallels between the construction of and sense-making around "factual" information in novels and the archive. He introduces the concept of the "dossier novel," a particular form of novel in which the relationship between archive and novel is thematized. His analysis paves the way for further interdisciplinary analysis of works of art and information institutions as different cultural modes of knowing. How do these commonalities extend our understanding of the presentation of knowledge and the viability of the novel form in our current digital age? Codebo offers potential answers to these questions.

In her paper entitled, "*More than a Child's Work: Framing Teacher Discourse about Play*", Karen Wohlwend provides interesting insights into teacher discourse as a form of resistance to the competing ethos of work versus play so commonly found in post-No Child Left Behind early childhood classrooms. Through use of microethnographic discourse analysis, Wohlwend found that new cultural forms of talk surfaced amongst teachers when asked to discern between definitions of child's work versus child's play. In so doing, she documents the ways in which teachers create successful, relevant classrooms in the wake of increased accountability demands.

Kate Quinn offers a somewhat different perspective on voice as expressed through transformative leadership in her paper, "*Exploring Departmental Leadership: How Department Chairs Can Be Transformative Leaders*". Here, Quinn creates a framework for how chairs, in particular, can effectively transform departmental climates in order to offer more consistent, pro-family support to faculty. In her argument, Quinn makes explicit the important intersections

between transformational leadership and organizational culture as the operational nexus for effecting organizational change.

Finally, Patrick Keilty resumes a dialogue initiated at a recent Information Studies symposium held at UCLA. The November 17, 2006 event brought together a number of celebrated scholars and practitioners to address the historical marginalization of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) concerns within the traditional Information Studies (IS) domains of library services, archiving, information and knowledge construction.

It should be noted that in the final stages of publication, we received the very sad news that Barbara Gittings, one of the extraordinary panelists in the UCLA/Information Studies symposium, passed away. Gittings was a life-long LGBT activist who, among other things, fought to successfully change the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-IV classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder. In addition, she was active within the American Library Association (ALA), where she worked to increase the availability and prominence of LGBT resources within the association and public libraries writ large. While the LGBT and IS communities have lost one of their most outspoken and committed activists, Barbara Gittings' work most certainly continues on through events such as the UCLA LGBT/IS symposium. An appreciation of Gittings, along with video highlights of her keynote, accompany Keilty's essay. More extensive footage from the symposium will also be made available on a new, supplemental *InterActions* website currently under development.

In this issue of *InterActions*, we have intentionally selected articles that address a broad range of topics within the fields of education and information studies. Yet within this great variability, each of these authors, in their own way, probe, reshape, and/or question some of the fundamental tensions and existing notions of truth we struggle with as scholars, practitioners, and activists. Along the way, we hope our readers make this issue, and others to follow, a space for critical engagement and reflection upon your own pursuit of truth. Imagine the possibilities if we were to collectively engage in this way.

References

- Foucault, M. (1980). Truth and Power. In C. Gordon (Ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books. (Original work published in 1977).
- Kellner, D. (1989). *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Marcuse, H. (1968). *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*. Boston: Beacon Press.