

Curriculum Interruptus

Steven Khan

Interruption is a common theme in critiques of the privilege given to oppressive narratives in education and society that go by any number of “isms,” such as chauvinism, sexism, racism, nepotism, and elitism. The word *interruption* derives from the Latin *interruptus* (*inter* – between and *rumpere* – to break). Literally, then, an interruption is a “breaking in between,” a speaking out of turn, a queering/querying of established and entrenched habits of thinking, speaking, doing, and being. *Queer* here does not represent the identities of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered; rather it marks work that refuses “the heterosexual bribe,” that is, the sociocultural rewards of power, prestige, and privilege offered to those who inscribe their behaviours, thinking, products, and performances within the range of *normal* heterosexual identities. In this article, I want to attempt an interruption of heteronormative discourses surrounding curriculum in which, as Gerald Unks, editor of the *Gay Teen* writes, “*homosexuals do not exist. They are 'non-persons' in the finest Stalinist sense. They have fought no battles, held no offices, explored nowhere, written no literature, built nothing, invented nothing and solved no equations.*” Dare we help future generations to learn not just *tolerance*, but *respect* for difference, and beyond that *reverence* for life in all its diversity in our contested Caribbean societies?

A first path is to actively acknowledge the contributions of persons of “difference” within the disciplines so that learners have the opportunity to see and hear others like themselves in *their* curriculum. This is the road already travelled by women, ethnic and religious minorities, and the differently able. Though, I might add, with limited success in school curricula. In mathematics, for example, everyone learns about the role of binary codes in computers. Fewer have learnt that the device was made possible by the work of English mathematician, Alan Turing, who during World War II played a significant part in deciphering German Enigma messages. Fewer still will learn that Alan Turing was gay. He first became aware of his homosexuality during adolescence, and during the postwar period suffered the ignominy of having the details of his private life dissected in the press. Forced to undergo hormone treatments to “cure” his homosexual urges, and suffering from relentless public exposure, the shy genius committed suicide at the age of 41. Turing’s case, while not unique, is one of the more tragic.

Educators must also confront homophobic rhetoric with evidence and research drawn from anthropological, biological, psychological, and sociological sources. For example, the argument that homosexuality is rare or anomalous in nature is called into question by the observation and documentation of same-sex couplings in more than 450 different vertebrate species and countless invertebrate species. The professor who conducted the research argues that sex is not only for passing on genes as every science student learns, but is also an important aspect of social cooperation, and suggests that homosexuality is a feature of advanced animal communities. These and other models in the natural and social sciences attempt to explain why homosexuality as a “trait” occurs and persists in natural populations.

Schools are notoriously conservative and heteronormative. Among students, *queer* and *faggot* are often labels applied to those who do not aggressively pursue the opposite sex, spend much of their time alone, or are involved in activities with groups seen to be of questionable sexual

orientation, in order to attempt to regulate behaviour. Impugning sexual orientation is a strong form of peer control exerted by adolescents of all ages. Such bullying ought to be seen as intolerable as using words like, *nigger*, *coolie*, *bitch*, and *ho* to denigrate another human being. Unfortunately it usually is not.

Here in the Caribbean, as we confront the consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, homophobia, and socially sanctioned sexual violence, we have interrupting work to do *with* our communities. Sexuality education must move beyond providing mere information *about sex* to becoming more involved in probing questions around the production of knowledge *about sexuality*. Unlike its coital counterpart, *curriculum interruptus* is less concerned with preventing procreative potentialities which are dependent on patriarchal responsibilities that are often reneged upon in our Caribbean contexts; rather, it is more concerned with re-establishing the obscured connections between those acts of disruption that have left individuals/groups with no connection to their futures, pasts, or presents. Perhaps by interrupting our sometimes *corrupt* and *bankrupt* visions of what curriculum *is* we might loosen the stranglehold of the *singularity of sameness* that drives many curriculum decisions towards imagining newer, more *just* possibilities of what curriculum *might become*.

School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine