

**Woking Curriculum:
Youth, popular cultures, and moving images matter!**

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Abstract: In these intensified anti-Black, anti-Aboriginal, anti-LGBTQI times, this paper offers woking curriculum as an educational-political proposition. Schools are often places of rejection of young people's investment in popular culture and their attuned sensibilities to moving images in videogames, cartoons, and popular movies. Through a spoken word poem this paper begins to respond to this disinvestment offering an analysis of why and how the popular moving images must be made curriculum. The paper draws from visual and classroom-based research in the United States, Australia, and Colombia.

Keywords: curriculum; images; LGBTQI; Black; Indigenous; Aboriginal

Introduction: A spoken word poem to the disinterested school district



Trayvon Martin 1996 - 2012¹

February 26, 2012 Trayvon Martin
August 9, 2014 Mike Brown
September 23, 2016 Jazz Alford
July 5, 2016 Melisa Ventura
July 4, 2016 Anthony Nuñez
March 6, 2015 Tony Robinson
The list is interminable

Many of their names are unknown to us

¹ This is a paper about images that deploys images to draw attention and interrogate images. In the current journal publishing culture where written text is the norm, the inclusion of images might require additional explanation. The three images inserted in the spoken word poem bring the protest for the lives of Black, Brown, and Queer youth to the academic journal in their demand to interrogate the antiblack, antibrown, and antiqueer regime that seeks to eradicate multiple forms of existence.

The camera arrived too late, perhaps
You watched their cases from the seat of your comfort
watch
as these atrocities only come close to you
through the screens
Your bodies, including your eyes, sometimes, are too
far removed
from Black
and Brown
And young,
and popular culture,
and moving images
popular moving images
Cartoons
Movies
And videogames

And you claim your duty is education
Making grandiose statements about diversity
And inclusion of minorities
Increasing participation
and closing “the gap”



Dylan Voller

Banner by the Warriors of the Aboriginal Resistance (WAR) Collective
& lead artists Arika Waulu Gabbi Briggs

And yet to the question
Of popular youth culture in moving images as curriculum
You said
“The district is not interested”
“The district is not interested”
In how young people are
Ruling and building civilizations,
How young people are mining cities
“The district is not interested”
In how young people are flying drones in foreign countries,
Not interested
In how young people are trading materials,
Not interested
In how young people are engaging in urban planning
Not interested
In how young people are selling goods,
Not interested
In how young people are designing clothing,
designing race,
designing phenotypes,
laughing with stereotypes,
demolishing culture, and
creating culture
Not
Interested

What are you interested in?
The district’s Strategic Framework
That students have a voice and a choice

What does it mean for students to have voice and a choice?
Are you listening?
Are you going to listen?



Sergio Urrego 1997-2014

Before images in the news, the young people in the photographs inserted in this spoken word poem were made moving images. Trayvon Martin was a “Black” “teenage” boy”² living in Florida, USA, who was killed by George Zimmerman. Dyllan Voller is an “Aboriginal” “youth” incarcerated for several years since the age of twelve and tortured in a youth detention center in Australia’s Northern Territory.³ Sergio Urrego was a “gay/queer” “adolescent” from Bogotá, Colombia who committed suicide after being the object of relentless homophobic discrimination (See Nieto Roa, 2017; Patiño, 2017). Viewed through a sniper, their moving bodies as moving images were framed and shot (literally in the case of Trayvon Martin and many other Black and Brown bodies like and unlike him (e.g., “Black” and “Brown” “Women” and “Transwomen”).⁴ Their bodies moving through the school, the neighbourhood, and the territory were captured and imaged while construed as a hazard threatening hetero-patriarchal and Euro-colonial orders. Sergio’s gay presence in school threatened the school’s norms of permissible hetero desires and masculine performance. Trayvon’s Black body in a hood and at night threatened the safety of the neighborhood located in a colonial settler state where “white” lives must be protected at the expense of Black lives.⁵ Dylan’s Aboriginal body also threatened the settler colonial state by violating the imposed law and order that continues to incriminate and incarcerate Aboriginal people. Their moving images and still images moving through protests and *manifestaciones*, public debates, and campaigns refuse the orders seeking their removal. *They*—historically made Black-other, Aboriginal-other, Queer-other—are *determined to stay to pierce the school curriculum and to demand that moving images matter in schools.*

Dylan (the person) is and Trayvon and Sergio (the people) were objects of society. They are and were society’s much needed “others”/objects that enable the production of order and “the

² I use the quotations deliberately to draw attention to the historical making-up of people as particular kinds (i.e. “teenage”, “boy”, “Aboriginal”) (López López, 2018). I capitalize Black, Indigenous, and Aboriginal against textual conventions as a political act to amplify lives historically suppressed and reduced.

³ In July 25th 2016, the Australian television program Four Corners aired “Australia’s Shame,” a set of disturbing images of Don Dale, a youth detention center in Australia’s Northern territory (“Australia’s Shame,” 2016). The program shows eleven year-old Dylan Voller being stripped naked, and assaulted by prison guards. In 2015 at age 17 he was shown hooded and tied to a chair for two hours. Voller’s and other cases triggered the closure of Don Dale in 2014 and its reopening as a “reformed” prison in 2015”. Australia’s Northern territory is still home for many Aboriginal Australians like Dylan Voller.

⁴ For a count of Native American, Black, Hispanic/Latino killed in 2016, see for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/the-counted-map-us-police-killings>

⁵ Capitalizing Black is an anti antiblack political act in writing. Uncapitalizing white and suspending it in quotation marks throughout the text is act of revolt against what Sylvia Wynter calls “conventional reason” in its production of ‘the selected being and natural organism’ historically fabricated “white”.

normal". As objects, Dylan, Trayvon, and Sergio's function—even before they were born—has been to be/become society's "abnormal". In the course of their lives, societies raised and socialized them to become the criminal to be incarcerated (Alexander, 2012), the threat to be exterminated, the abomination to be annihilated. When the right time came, their potentiality as societal repulsive objects was actualized. Bleeding on the concrete and squirming in the chair, their bodies have been televised, podcasted, and tweeted. Once dead, their bodies cease to exist as objects fulfilling societies' fantasies of safety. Their function as objects has concluded as their bodies become an image, a reminder of what is important (Sontag, 2003). As image they are no longer an object but a thing.

As things, images of Sergio, Dylan, and Trayvon and those of many others annihilated as abject others (Kristeva, 1982), have the capacity to designate an affair. The affair in this case is the call of things to engage. The engagement they call for is to be determined in the encounter with the image. As a thing, images are beyond the grid of intelligibility in terms of what they are expected to produce. The encounter with the image as a thing is devoid of formulas and templates. What remains true is that as things, images are not objects especially images which are read as visual reproductions of objects such as the images of Trayvon, Dylan, and Sergio. These images *of* Trayvon, Dylan and Sergio call on *other* images to become things and designate affairs.

In this article I offer *woking curriculum* as an educational-political proposition to address the disengagement of schools before the already present presence of popular moving images and their affect in virtually every form of socialization practiced by the emerging generations. In the most literal sense moving images are still images/photographs reproduced between 24-48 frames per second. This rapid show of pictures gives the viewer a sense of movement, a moving picture, a moving image. The paper is a necessary provocation called for by images to engage curricula. The provocation has already begun in this first section with the images of youth who, no longer serving as objects, have designated an unavoidable affair to the curriculum: that images are engaged in curriculum as a critical and necessary conversation. In the second section I discuss the image itself in an attempt to create a fictive foundation from which to enter the discussion of the inevitability of popular moving images in the curriculum. In the third section I return to the spoken word poem and the challenge of hospitality and the need of the school curriculum to seek participation in the conversations young people are having with popular moving images. In the

last section I engage explicitly with *woking curriculum*, which is informed by the term *woke* in Eryka Badu's song Master Teacher and the use of #StayWoke to tag the violence inflicted on Black bodies through various sets of popular moving images relevant to the current moment and which are part of young people's lives in the United States, Australia, parts of Asia and Latin America.

What is an image? Affective gatherings

Given that this essay is a curricular provocation through the "image," thinking with Frantz Fanon, let us begin with the almost impossible question of "what is an image?"

Look at children's comic books: All the blacks are mouthing the ritual "yes, boss." In films the situation is even more acute. Most of the American films dubbed in French reproduce the grinning stereotype *Ya bon Banina*. In one of these recent films, *Steel Sharks*, there is a black guy on a submarine speaking the most downright classic dialect imaginable. Furthermore, he is a true nigger, walking behind the quarter master, trembling at the latter's slightest fit of anger, and is killed in the end.[...] [T]he black man is portrayed in a certain way, and the same stereotype can be found from the black man in *Sans pitié*—"Me work hard, me never lie, me never steal"—to the servant in *Duel in the Sun* (Fanon, 2008 [1952], p.17)

In the comic book and the films referenced by Fanon, the image is a mechanical reproduction. At the time of writing, the comic may have been hand drawn, printed, and distributed in print. The film is made up of sequences of still frames produced with a camera and reproduced at several frames per second so the viewer experiences a moving image in a movie theater. But images are beyond mechanical reproductions.⁶ As Gloria Anzaldúa contends, images exist in our heads (Anzaldúa, 1987). They are portrayals of particularities, for instance, in Fanon's analysis, of a Black man, a trembling "nigger" afraid of his master, a killed "nigger". For Susan Sontag (2003) images are reminders of what is important; an example in Fanon's analysis of *Sans pitié* is that the Black man appears self-apologetic and self-doubtful. I propose

⁶ See, for example, Jaar, 2013; Jay, 1988, 2011; Keenan & Zolghard, 2013; Lydon, 2015; Mitchell, 1984, 1985, 1996, 2006, 2011; Poole, 1997; Sontag, 2001. I am aware that here I am referencing primarily scholars historically made-up "white".

an engagement with images as *affective gatherings*, for they have the capacity to *affect* and *be affected*.

Images affect. And affect is racialized (Berg & Ramos-Zayas, 2015). Have particular images of the “Black man” affected the killers of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald and other “Black” youth and “men”? What images of “Black” historically fabricated are affecting the perpetrators of violence on Black and Brown bodies in the United States and beyond? The image of the “Black guy” killed is one too familiar (Coates, 2015; Hill, 2017; Sharpe, 2016). Black bodies imaged as disposable appear far too often affecting those historically fabricated “white” “masters” of Black bodies and deciders of the life and death of the same bodies. In a recent discussion with third graders in a rural town in the US Midwest on why main characters often appear “white” in popular images, one student shared his perception of Black characters in Harry Potter as “the people that get hurt and are taken to the hospital” (Classroom observation May 17, 2017). Images produce real effects on bodies. Ta-Nehesi Coates reminds us of these effects on Black bodies; racism “dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscles, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth” (Coates, 2015, p. 9).

Images have the capacity to be affected. The Black Lives Matter movement in the United States and its reverberations in other parts of the world is arguably a precipitation via the “bullet-riddled body bleeding on the asphalt” (Rankine, 2015) and the image of it. Through the massive availability of affordable mobile imaging technologies, the historically made disposable and scared black body has affected the image. It is not that Black people were not being killed at alarming rates before the Black Lives Matters movement; it is that the atrocious incidents are being amplified by the photograph and the mobile video. As if demanding coming out of anonymity, these violent incidents come onto the image affecting it. Circulating through social media, the affected image goes on to affect other images in the exponential documentation of brutality on “Black” and also “Brown,” “women,” “trans,” and “disabled” bodies.

Apart from being affective, images are gatherings of things, objects, people, and animals and how these entities become differentiated from one another. Images are gatherings of pixels and the memories they shape and color. When they meet the viewer, images are gatherings of gazes that beg the image to speak authority and sometimes suspicion. Whether from the late 1800s or instantly from the smart phone, images reach us with a heavy and convoluted baggage sometimes traceable to particular discernible histories, and sometimes with incomprehensible

trajectories. Images are historical gatherings pregnant with promises, demands, and expectations. Images are hoarders of the painful, the comfortable, the forgotten, or that which is better forgotten. The image of Dylan Voller above is one example. As other images, Dylan's is a gathering of scenes of colonial destruction never forgotten by Aboriginal Australians. They are scenes boxed away by some who think them archives of the past. The images of Aboriginals operating in the heads of the guards in the youth detention center where Dylan was captive are gatherings of fabrications of criminality and delinquency. A gathering of episodes of the colonial state patrolling its fence comes to the image in the minds of the law and order to incarcerate, restrain, and torture Aboriginal youth. Dylan's portrait of Aboriginal destruction is a gathering of promises to maintain the current state of affairs. But like Trayvon's photograph, Dylan's is no longer an object. His image is a thing that gathers evocative insinuations. As things, these images are explosions of uncontainable meanings and incalculable power.

Popular moving images in school

In their journeys through multiple geographies, geo-politics, histories, and technological landscapes, the popular moving image, as those referenced by Fanon, is a hoarder. What it brings is a multitude of semantic emergences not to be disposed of but engaged with. Young people know this very well. The popular moving image comes to the classroom and the curriculum. Often it sneaks in when the teacher is not watching, when the curriculum is frenetically preoccupied with standards. It manages to avoid the surveillance of testing to visit with young people. Sometimes when caught, the school calls it daydreaming and being distracted. "Focus!" Young people are told. Often its entry is denied when it abruptly shows up in lessons whether a young person raises their hand or just shouts it out as a contribution. "We are not talking about that right now". The popular moving image is shamed and sent away though it manages to stay and remain invisibly present. At other times the popular moving image is invited into or rather coopted in the classroom to deliver competence. In an "underperforming" school serving primarily Black and Brown students, Pikachu is on display asking young people to read more.⁷ A *Minecraft* skin accompanies the chart that ranks the classroom math stars of the week, a chart that produces differences between those students who have achieved and are math "competent"

⁷ To learn more about Pikachu, see, for example, <http://pokemon.wikia.com/wiki/Pikachu>

and those who are not.⁸ A common appearance of the popular moving image in the classroom is at the end of the term, or the year, or after a competition when a full movie such as *Home* (DreamWorks, 2015) or *Rio* (Blue Sky, 2011) is shown accompanied by popcorn or pizza as a reward for being good, for winning, for complying. But popular moving images such as *Rio*, *Home*, *Pokémon* and *Minecraft* are hoarders of a multitude of semantic meanings available for display, as a gift for pleasure, and yet uncontainable in the fixity of a display, a reward, or a classroom chart. So the classroom is not the only space the moving image enters. It runs with young people through the playground, free to participate in conversations on the monkey bars, the benches, and the school cafeteria. As a third grader in the United States put it, “kids don’t talk about videogames in the classroom, but when they are in the playground I have seen them talk about videogames with their bodies, like a performance” (Classroom observation March 13, 2017).

Popular moving images are affective gatherings of cool graphics, sophisticated animation, and challenging algorithms. Young people like them. Some young people cannot stop talking about them. They are, among many others, the *Lego Movie*, *Frozen*, *Madden Mobile*, *Spongebob*, *Plants vs. Zombies*, *Roblox*, *Chhota Bheem*, *the Flash*, *Teen Titans*, *Doraemon*, *Transformers*, *Minecraft*, and *Pokémon*. They are infinite. Videogames, movies, and cartoons are popular as they resonate with other images already in young people’s heads. Their popularity implies they are a packed gathering of gazes. The cartoon, popular movies, and videogames are soaring multi-million dollar industries. That is many of them are, in the words of Stuart Hall, saturated with popular imperialism (Hall, 1981). Popular moving images are the viewing experience that young people curate for themselves when they get on their screens, on the couches, hiding from their parents and guardians, and before they get up in the morning. They are often deemed “non-educational”, “inappropriate”, and therefore unwelcomed. For many of us grownups in the company of young people, several popular moving images are gatherings of annoyance and irritation. Despite that, often they also serve as a great source to keep young people uninterruptedly occupied. When woke, we often find many of them offensive, misogynistic, sexist, racist, heteronormative, ageist, colorist, patriarchal, and a source of indignation. And they are what makes youth popular visual cultures. In these ways, popular moving images are gatherings of youth participation, pleasure, and a determining source of

⁸To learn more about Minecraft and skins, see, for example, <https://www.planetminecraft.com/resources/skins/>

education.

The challenge of hospitality



Steven’s Performance “Sadie’s Song”
Screenshot of Steven Universe Season 2
(Cartoon Network 2015)

Let us return to Sergio Urrego’s image and its determination to stay to demand that the moving image matters in schools. Let us accompany Sergio’s image with a popular moving image, Steven Universe (<http://www.cartoonnetwork.com.au/show/steven-universe>). Steven Universe is a TV show aired by a mainstream channel and a favorite with youth and adult audiences alike. Steven’s sensibilities, their tears, pink shirts, and manners historically coded “feminine”, visually challenge the onlookers’ view of “male” performance, the multiple expressions of our emotions, and how our affect can be conducive to change, to “save the day”, in the cartoon, and to disrupt alienation in the classroom, the playground, and the multitude of spaces in young people’s daily experiences. Steven Universe is not a “gay show”, it is not a “diversity” show, it is just a cartoon TV show that, aware of its purchase and power to influence and make culture, is intentional about presentation, color, body shapes, accents, hair, performance, and performativity (Butler, 2004, in regards to the *Steven Universe: Art & Origins* book character Concrete, see creator Rebecca Sugar’s Twitter apology on July 15, 2017).

In the Colombia in which Sergio Urrego was born, socialized, made object, schooled and where his life was taken, popular moving images such as Steven Universe must be welcomed in the mainstream curriculum. This is not because of representation, because Steven or other characters in the show are like Sergio or young people like Sergio, but because Steven is an unlimited source of educational engagement to interrogate. Steven is an interminable reservoir of meanings of what we think we know about society, science, history, language, masculinities and femininities.

An important argument following Jen Gilbert's (2014) analytics of hospitality in school would be to make a case for the curriculum to extend unconditional hospitality to the popular moving image so it enters the curriculum in the company of young people. The argument would be for school districts to be interested in and welcome popular moving images because they are youth cultures. Often schools' missions purport to deliver culturally relevant pedagogy and inclusion. Another reason to welcome popular moving images is the fact that engagement with the visual is indeed a hospitable practice towards young people's multiple expressions. That is why young people approach the moving image and why the image is popular.

In this argument towards hospitality, with Derrida (2000) we could think of the curriculum as the master of the house having sovereignty and the popular moving image as the guest to be welcomed. When I speak of the curriculum I am referring to school curriculum in what has been traditionally understood as explicit, mandated, core, and standard content, practices, and aspirations. This curriculum does not include popular moving images. Popular moving images do not belong in the classroom curriculum but in the home, the streets, and other public spaces. One could argue that the popular moving image is the "other" or "foreigner" of the school curriculum. As the host, the school curriculum determines who is to be welcomed, who is permitted to enter, and who is to stay as a visitor or permanent resident. When welcomed, the guest, in this case the popular moving image, if treated under the law of hospitality, is asked to speak the language of the host upon entry to the curriculum. Is the language of the moving image "appropriate"? Is it "educational"? As a guest, the popular moving image is asked to show its credentials for it to be admissible into the territory of learning. What twenty-first-century skills can young people learn from it to succeed in the future? To be allowed in, the popular moving image is asked for proof of its legitimacy as a deliverer of predetermined content. Does the popular moving image impart the content standards of the core subjects (e.g. math, reading,

science)? If extended “unconditional hospitality” (Derrida, 2000), the popular moving image would put the host curriculum in question. Its sovereignty and ontology as host would be disrupted for it can no longer have conditions for the guest upon arrival including calling it a guest. Without a host as the master of the curriculum house and the guest as the foreigner seeking entry, the walls securing the sovereignty of the curriculum would become unbuilt.

This call for hospitality towards the popular moving image sounds compelling as long as there is one visitor seeking entry or asylum in the master’s house. This assumes powerlessness and need on the part of that which arrives and supremacy and power on the part of the master of the house. The popular moving image, as the one which arrives at the curriculum, is far from seeking asylum in the classroom and the school. The popular moving image already lives with young people and is in no need of a house. It is already at home with young people. Young people and the popular moving image own many resources they often exchange with each other. They are in constant conversations. *Schooling is oblivious to the nature, content, and terms of these conversations.* What schooling must recognize is that the dialogues young people and moving images hold are rich and meaningful. Often, when given a chance, young people reference the popular moving image to express how they are making sense. Hardly ever do most young people want to abandon the conversations they sustain with the popular moving image (a common expression by young people is “I’m finishing up my game”). That is partly why there are so many rules in many homes about “screen time”, or why limits are set to watching TV, or why electronics are not allowed in many schools. Videogames, cartoons and popular movies are educating young people in significant ways about a wide range of matters. They are educational. The popular moving image does not need the school curriculum for it *is* already curriculum in the company of young people. Conversely, the school curriculum needs the popular moving image. Popular moving images are youth culture. The school *needs* the popular moving image to make the curriculum “culturally relevant”, as many school missions purport to do. The literature in the field of cultural relevance does not fall short in making this argument (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris & Alim, 2017). The important argument I have been building here is that what is at risk of becoming irrelevant, if it already is not, is the school curriculum itself. The school curriculum as known by mainstream education cannot afford to remain arrogant and disinterested in the complex and robust conversations that young people are having with popular moving images. Returning to hospitality, it is the school curriculum which must seek entry into those

conversations because without it, it will continue to be incrementally irrelevant for young people, not to mention it will continue to “suck” (in) the lives of those to whom it is historically highly indebted (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Love, 2016; Stovall, 2016). Below I offer *woking curriculum* as an educational-political proposition for schooling to approach young people and the popular moving images that make-up their visual cultures.

Woking curriculum

¡*Espabílate!* is an expression with a multitude of affects. *Espabilar* is the act of blinking. In the Caribbean I know, when your attention is lagging and you need to notice and respond accordingly, your elder tells you ¡*Espabílate!* When there is an imminent danger and you are exhorted to act, your pal says ¡*Espabílate!* When you know something, but for a minute it seems you have lost awareness of it, your mentor says to you ¡*Espabílate!* When you must be alert, your friend reminds you ¡*Espabílate!* When you are letting your guard down and you must open your eyes, your partner warns you ¡*Espabílate!* When there is the need to designate an affair to something that is happening in the immediate surrounding, your comrade announces ¡*Espabílate!*

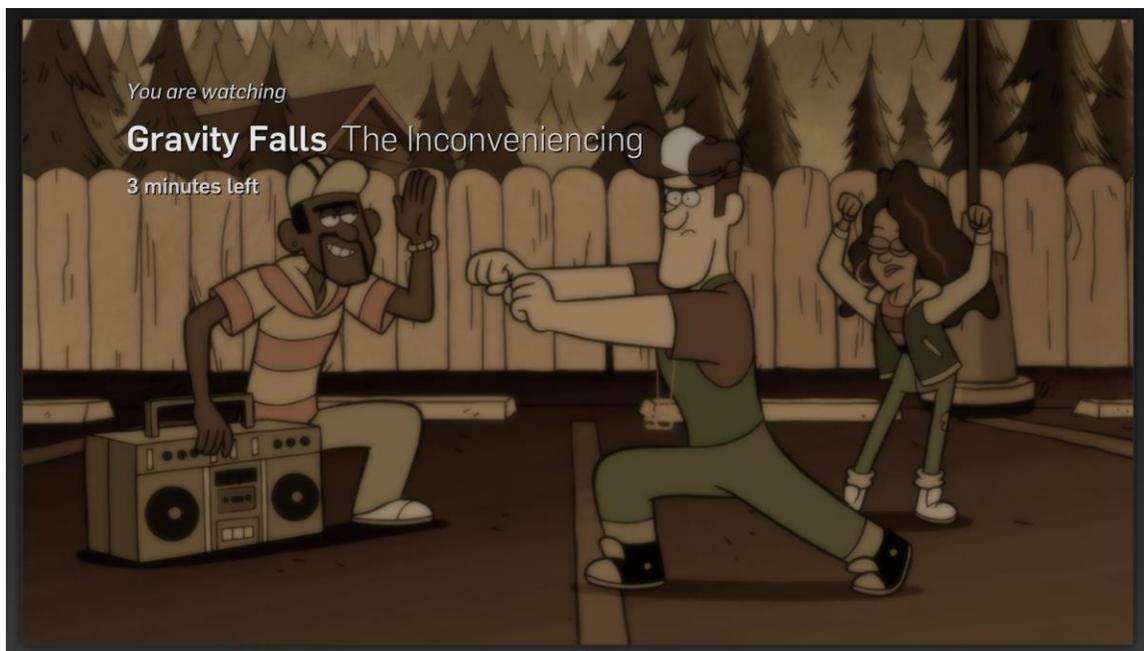
¡*Espabílate!* is a Brown expression in conversation with *woke*, a Black expression also with a multitude of affects. In addition to all the above uses of *espabílate*, the expressions of *woke* relevant for this conceptualization relate to how *woke* has been taken up in popular culture and through the #BlackLivesMatter movement to tag the violence inflicted on Black bodies #StayWoke. To #StayWoke is to remain informed of what is going on around you in times of crisis and conflict, but also when they are not apparent. To #StayWoke is refusing systemic brutality. To #StayWoke is reading the lines and between the lines. To #StayWoke is mobilizing against anti-blackness. To #StayWoke is watching the moving image vigilantly to interrupt the visual murdering of Black, Brown, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native, and LGBTQI bodies and the cultures that sustain them. Woking curriculum, is therefore, the continuous (i.e. *woking*) act to call ¡*Espabílate!* and the insistence to #StayWoke during planning and delivery of curriculum. Woking curriculum looks for the hashtag (#StayWoke) as a meeting location for agitation, and has no desire to alter the hashtag. I will demonstrate what this entails. The suffix *-ing* is intentional. It reminds us of the continuous nature of the action. Woking curriculum means the continuous act of woking the curriculum itself so it remains exhorted to act in the face of danger, so it remains conscious, alert, and never lets its guard down. This is crucial in order for the

school curriculum to simultaneously serve as a broker in the conversations between young people and popular moving images. Broker means not imposing or dictating but feeling things out and inserting contributions that amplify how young people and popular moving images are already performing wokeness in an important effort to expand that wokeness.

I draw from singer and songwriter Erykah Badu whose lyrics brought “woke” to the realm of popular culture in Stuart Hall’s distortion and resistance sense of the term. Badu’s song *Master Teacher* (Badu, 2008, 8) offers the school curriculum an important place to join the conversation young people are having with popular moving images.

What if it were no niggas
 Only master teachers?
 I stay woke (dreams dreams)
 What if there was no niggas
 Only master teachers?
 I stay woke (dreams dreams)
 What if it was no niggas only master teachers now?
 I stay woke (dreams dreams)
 (what if there was no niggas only master teachers now?)
 I stay woke (dreams dreams)

These woking verses are calling for a shift; a shift that is also inscribed in the demands—put forth by the images of Trayvon, Sergio, and Dylan—that the popular moving image matters.



Teenagers and Rap music

Screenshot of *Gravity Falls* Season 1 Episode 5
The Inconveniencing
(Disney/DisneyXD 2014)

Let us now consider the affective gathering that is *Gravity Falls* (<http://disneyxd.disney.com.au/gravity-falls>). *Gravity Falls* is one of several sets of popular moving images through which the woking curriculum can be mobilized. *Gravity Falls* is a 2012 show like any other in mainstream TV (Disney and Disney XD) watched by young people privileged enough to have electricity, a TV set, or a computer, phone, or tablet, cable or internet or mobile data, time, and freedom to watch the show. The show is in its second season. From informal interviews with young people who watch it, they say the show's appeal lies in its mystery theme combined with humor. The show is indeed a rich affective gathering. For the purposes of specificity I will focus on the question of racism, anti-blackness, and "Master Teachers". Not only the show's leads but most of the characters are primarily visually "white". Although not distinctly a revelatory observation, woking curriculum's turn in the conversation between young people and the popular moving image is to expand the discussion on the visual politics of which subjects get to appear in a widely watched show or how the particular visuals in fact draw a largely interested and invested viewership. In episode five of season one "The Inconveniencing", the two ghosts of a visibly "white"⁹ elderly couple appear to explain why they hate "teenagers".

Ghost 1: Teenagers were a scourge on our store.

Ghost 2: Always sassy-frazzing customers with their boomy boxes [see figure 5] and disrespectful short pants so we decided to up and ban them, but they retaliated with this new fangled Rap music.

Ghost 1: The lyrics, they were so hateful

[Rap music playing] Homework's wack and so are rules, tucking in your shirt's for fools.

Ghost 2: It was so shocking we were stricken down with double heart attacks. That's why we hate teenagers so much. Don't we honey?

This conversation between the two visually "white" ghosts is a repetition of the familiar anti-blackness narrative of the "super predator" Black youth, "street criminals" "almost

⁹ In the Australian context, and in other contexts in which histories of 'whitening' produce Black identified people who 'pass' as white, and 'white' presenting people who identified as "people of color" given racial trajectories unidentifiable via the visual, "visibly" here signals just that, what can be seen in the visual fabrication of raced bodies. People visibly identified as "Black" have even more complicated historical trajectories, however their being visibly identified as a "Black" is often less a contentious coding of the body.

completely unmoralized” “biggest and baddest generation any society has ever known” (Coates, 2017). “What if it was no niggas only master teachers now?” What if there was a shift from what Christina Sharpe calls “violent annotations of the Black being” towards Black ingenuity and Black youth as teachers and leaders of culture making (Sharpe, 2016, p.115). The exchange between the two ghosts is a key instance of popular moving images being an affective gathering of Black exclusion and beyond. This interaction within the show and between the show and young people is worth the curriculum requesting entry into the conversation in order to offer its woking contribution. Being admitted into the conversation means that young people reference the show in the school curriculum. The teacher may also reference the show as a proposal and young people must be interested in engaging with it. The school curriculum must first listen to the conversation.

How are young people responding to what the popular moving image is expressing? What are the content, nature, and terms of their response? What do young people make of the fact that up to episode five, though Black characters are flashed peppering the show without a major role (apart from Sheriff Blubs described by the show’s Wikia as “lazy” and “bumbling head”), when a Black character appears in a pivotal moment of an episode, it is a Black “male” presenting “teenager” accompanied by Rap music, and by words such as “scourge”, “sassy”, “frazzing”, “disrespectful”, “retaliated”, “hateful”, “shocking”, and “hate”? What are these 45 seconds worth of moving images an affective gathering of? What memories do the pixels in the pictures’ frames shape and color? What heavy and convoluted baggage does this set of images bring? What discernible histories become available through it? What connections can be made from “retaliation” to social movements; the Haitian revolution; maroonage; the civil, women, gay, Indigenous, and undocumented rights movements, and Black lives matter movement? As a historical gathering, what do these moving images expect in times when the “male” Black body is a continuous site of “disrespect”, “shock”, and “hate”? Is racism an archive of the past in a so-called “desegregated”, “post-racial”, “post apartheid”, “apologetic” world? How are criminality and delinquency fabricated in the show? Who is the perpetrator? What does he look like? How old is he? What do young people know about Rap, its histories, and influences? What do young people listen to, dance, and watch? Have they heard 4:44, Chance the Rapper, Nicki Minaj, and Kendrick Lamar? Listening to the conversation and inserting this set of questions—and a multitude of others about beat making, semantics, poetry, physics, sound engineering and many

more—could complicate the terms and interrogate the conversation young people are having with the popular moving image. That is woking curriculum. How has the popular image changed from the comic books and American movies referenced by Fanon in 1952 to the ones in 2017 (see, e.g., Nama, 2011)?

The film *The Incredibles* (Disney-Pixar, 2004) is another very popular set of moving images preferred by younger audiences. The superhero production is a rich nexus of relevant contemporary affairs: the health care system, rights, bombing, structural building failures and collapses, gender roles, societal norms, fitting in, and anti-blackness (Hartman, 1997, 2008; Wilderson, 2010). Take a look at this sequence in the film.



Frozone and Mr. Incredible caught by police
 And Frozone gets shot by a police officer
 Screenshot of *The Incredibles*
 (Disney-Pixar 2004)

In the first frame, a visibly “white” police officer comes into a building. Frozone or Lucious, a Black superhero and secondary character in the story, and Mr. Incredible, the “white” superhero and main protagonist, are surprised by the police after emerging from a building in flames. Both Mr. Incredible and Frozone comply with the hands up request from the police officer. In the second frame, the police officer points his gun to Frozone who, being thirsty after the coming out of the fire, asks to drink water and a few frames later (frame three above) gets shot by the police. The scene is saturated with rich points for debate, for example the context in which the actions take place, the fact that Lucious has superpowers (as Frozone) in a world still inundated by “white” superheroes, the fact that the characters were wearing masks in a crime scene, the fact that Frozone was just drinking water right before being shot, as Tamir Rice was just playing outside, Trayvon Martin was just out to buy Skittles, and Philando Castile was just driving with faulty brakelights. As a Black person, or a Black superhero, “you can be killed for simply being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black” (Rankine, 2015). The shooting sequence mirrors images from mobile phones and body cameras of police shootings released in recent years. This is the *visual murdering* of Black people before the eyes of emerging generations. The same woking curriculum questions asked of *Gravity Falls* could be inserted in this police-Frozone scene. However, remembering that the popular moving image as a thing is devoid of formulas and templates including those that the syntax of questions produce, perhaps the most important woking insertion points to what engagements do this set of images call for? What affects emerge in the classroom encounter between these moving images and young people while in the company of the woking curriculum as a participant? What conversations are young people already having with this Parental Guidance (PG) rated film?



Napi and Diana
Screenshot of *Wonder Woman: Rise of a Warrior*
(DC Comics and Warner Bros 2017)

She hardly needs any introduction. *Wonder Woman: Rise of a Warrior* (DC Comics and Warner Bros 2017). There seems to be a public sense that the film was long overdue. The “girls” in my research sites were eagerly awaiting the movie’s release. This anticipatory excitement is a marker of popular moving images and their nature as affective gatherings. The film collected 103.01 million dollars in North America in its opening weekend¹⁰. It is said to be the biggest opening ever by a woman director (Patty Jenkins) in Hollywood. This is an important achievement indeed which does not preclude relevant critiques of the inequitable treatment the film received along the lines of marketing and other matters. The film is a constellation of infinite expansive points worth years of unpacking. Young people have already started. Will the curriculum request entry to participate in the conversations between *Wonder Woman* and young people?

The image of Dylan Voller, the Australian Aboriginal youth tied to a chair (see above) with a spit hood on while being tortured, is a necessary place to say ¡*espabilate!* to and through the woking curriculum. Let us bring together the colonial experience of incarcerated Aboriginal youth in Australia and the youth popular culture product that is Wonder Woman along with the indigenous—Native American and beyond—issues that it raises. Napi greets Diana Prince(ss of Themyscira) in Blackfoot, a language of the Blackfoot (Schilling, 2017)¹¹. His appearance, as Aaron Bird Bear states, “as a more fully fleshed out living being rather than the usual thin stereotype that more often represents American Indians in cinema” of the “Native American”

¹⁰ <http://money.cnn.com/2017/06/04/media/wonder-woman-box-office/index.html>

¹¹ To learn more about the Blackfeet and the Blackfoot see, for example, McNeel, (2017).

character in this massive cultural product is a celebrated achievement for many “Indigenous” peoples in the Americas (Bird Bear personal communication, August 17, 2017). Viewers know Diana’s name very well. However, in the limited set of frames in which he appeared, Napi was called “Chief”, the derogatory term that mocks, essentializes, and simplifies Native Americans in the alleged attempt to honor them while correcting colonial tactics to reduce and invisibilize. Napi may be too much of a troublemaker and a trickster, a super human character himself. His origin story as a demigod in the Blackfoot creation myths is better kept in the background of the Blockbuster film so it does not obscure the story that matters, which is the *Wonder Woman* story this Warner Bros production chose to tell (see [Suffering Sappho! Wonder Woman and Feminism By Jack Halberstam](#)).

What sense are young people making of the insertion, in a predominantly “white” film, of “other”, or shall we say other-ized characters—Chief Napi (the Indigenous? Indian? Native? Aboriginal?), Sameer (the Brown, North African? Immigrant?), and Charlie (emotionally imbalanced? Disabled?)? What roles do these characters play in a story of heroism? Is Napi portrayed as a noble warrior, fierce, indomitable but obedient to his master? Napi. What’s in a name? Where are (what a society calls) superheroes in “Indigenous/Aboriginal/Native” epistemologies? What stories is a film of this magnitude telling? Who are the heroes or HERoes (as young people in a primary classroom challenged the term to make a case for Her as a Her-o)? What actions is this *WonderWoman*’s Her-oism predicated on? What is the role of the city (in this case London) and what is the role of the empire in Indigenous lives and vice-versa? Have young people heard of the #NoDAPL movement that sought to stop the invasion of Indigenous land in building a pipeline through Standing Rock (in the US)? Have the students heard of “Water is Life”, #StandingwithStandingRock, Berta Caceres, and other environmental activists and the Indigenous resistance against mining in the Americas? And what connections are young people making back to the role of Napi in the film (McNeel, 2017)?



“Steve Mines Diamond”
Screenshot of Minecraft animation
(<https://youtu.be/zfyUANs280U>)

The videogame *Minecraft* is “the most played game of all time” (Ito, 2016). Young people privileged enough to have access to a screen, internet connectivity at some point, time, and parental permission (which is usually not an obstacle), play it. It is mostly played by younger kids or older gamers-youtubers. Some of the goals of the game are to survive, create, craft, and make. “It is fun, unique, and creative!” This is one of the main reasons young people give when explaining why they prefer the game. Some young people report on their parents’ preference for the game because “it helps [kids] with their imagination”. The conversations young people are having with the game in their homes, public libraries, schools (education.minecraft.net), afterschool clubs, summer camps (e.g. connectedcamps.com) while on the move in buses, on trains, and on foot are sustained and intense.

Mining is one of two of the games’ main activities (surviving is the second one), young people report. In light of the woking curriculum interrogations raised about *Wonder Woman*, how are young people negotiating relationships within the game? What are the content, nature, and terms of young people’s responses to the materiality of the game, for instance crystals, minerals, wood, gold, creatures (e.g. mobs, withers), zombies, avatars mining, killing animals for survival and for fun, and more? How are the events and movements mentioned in the above (#NoDAPL, etc.) affecting the *Minecraft* popular moving image and the mods players make? When listening to the conversations young people are sustaining with *Minecraft*, what capacities does the game have to affect social, environmental, and epistemologic relationships? What is *Minecraft* a gathering of? What objects, materials, people, creatures, animals, and humans does it

gather and how are the border differences drawn to separate them, for example separating animal-human-zombie? Who gets visually bullied? How are the boundaries of difference performed in the game? What are the promises, demands, and expectations of such performance? How are the border differences patrolled? What is *Mine-craft* as a moving image mining and hoarding that is better forgotten? If given the chance to participate in the conversation young people are having with *Wonder Woman: Rise of a Warrior* and *Minecraft*, these insertions could be part of the woking curriculum contribution to address the affairs designated by the image of Dylan Voller.





Riley's mother's emotions, Riley's father's emotions, Riley's emotions
Screenshots of *Inside Out*
(Disney-Pixar 2015)

Let us return to the image of Sergio Urrego and its determination to stay to pierce the homophobic discrimination in school curricula. Let us also enter a moment when young people grant the school curriculum's request to participate in their conversations with the film *Inside Out* (Disney Pixar 2015). *Inside Out's* moving images are an explosion of uncontainable meaning and incalculable power. The film's popularity is undeniable. Many young people report having watched it on multiple screens several times. Riley and her emotions are the main characters in the story. Riley is a female presenting eleven-year old from Minnesota, and her emotions are Anger, Sadness, Disgust, Fear, and Joy, who is the lead emotion. The film emerged in an animated discussion in a third-grade classroom in South Central Wisconsin in the United States. This area is the producer of United States Republican Governor Scott Walker, the current Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, and many Donald Trump supporters. Welcoming the school curriculum into their conversation with the popular moving image, students performed ¡*espabilate!* Here I offer a condensed cacophony, a collage of highlighted statements of a more extensive woking curriculum session in an elementary school classroom. Following an earlier woking conversation about the fact that most if not all of the superhero books available in the classroom and school library feature mostly "white" and male presenting characters, the students flipped through the book covers: "White"! Pass the book. "White"! Next. "White"! Next. "White"! ¡*Espabilate!* Riley is also white. And Joy, well, she is white too. Is that because Riley is "white"? Why are the protagonists of popular movies and cartoons "white"? Wait. Riley is a girl and Joy is a girl. Riley's mom's emotions are female. Riley's dad's emotions are all male (see screenshots above). But Riley's emotions are male and female. Why? That is because

grownups care about that stuff. Being male as a grown up, being female as a grown up, well kids don't care about that stuff. But Joy is female because girls are joyful. Anger is male because males are more, how to say it... aggressive. Sadness is female because she is a girl. Girls get sad and cry. Boys get angry. Boys fear. And girls like Disgust are sassy.

The young people are generously opening the conversation they have with *Inside Out* to questions and statements that interrogate and protect gender norms. Their conversation offers the curriculum a lesson on how the popular moving image guards the performativity of gender and how the young people are reckoning with and confronting it. This is a crucial collective space that makes Sergio Urrego (and the visualities of others like and unlike him) possible in classrooms, schools, and societies. When school manuals of rules cancel out the queer presence of Sergio and those who like him interrogate the heteronormativity of schools and the curriculum, conversations in which young people, teachers, and school administrators wrestle with gender and sexuality norms are paramount. In conversations such as these, it is not Queer youth who are put in question but the school and the classroom themselves. The conversation demonstrates to the curriculum the struggle that is sexuality in its normative visual encoding and the maladjustments that a discussion on the visuals can produce in some young people (Luther King, 1963). Furthermore, the conversation unveils how the encounter between the popular moving image and young people in the classroom can create educational spaces that see the end of curriculum mastery as we know it dictating content, and in the process see the emergence of the masterful teacher that Erykah Badu invokes; Black, Brown, and Queer youth producing relevance, brilliance, and wokeness in engaging with and in making culture.

The young people's cacophony of racializing, gendering, and sexualizing emotions and the production of affect is woking curriculum emerging. Young people speculating as a collective, reencountering the popular moving image in the company of peers, reexamining, accepting, and challenging is an honor and a necessity schools cannot afford to conceal. Woking curriculum emerges when young people's struggle over images and signification educate the school curriculum on matters of concern, on matters in which the school curriculum is actively disinterested. Not only are young people schooling the school in their engagement with *Inside Out*, they are also pushing the limits of Disney and now Pixar's visual craft with and beyond the traditions of critical media and critical cultural studies. The unstoppable conversation sustained by young people on the basis of the popular moving image is wrestling with meaning, affect,

identities, the social constructions of me and we, sexuality, the visual rendering of who is who and who can be who. Intense moments of collision in the examination of the visual rendering of gender and the worlds that performatively and constantly produce the binary child and the child that confronts the binary are glimpses of the possibilities of moving images as curriculum, as woking curriculum. The selected expressions in the collage above are only a portion of the exponential capabilities at the nexus of the moving image, young people, and the woking curriculum *inside* school classrooms.

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