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ABSTRACT

The author examines recent trends in curriculum study through a discussion of three schools of thought in the field--traditionalism, conceptual-empiricism, and reconceptualism. (IRT)

The Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies

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This morning I will discuss the reconceptualization. I have little new to say over what was said in the preface to Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists. I will stay with that tripartite division of the field. Today I will amplify the categories somewhat with references to studies published after the writing of the preface. Finally, I will report developments related to the reconceptualization which are subsequent to the publication of the book.

* * *

If we were to count heads, we would find that most curricularists are traditionalists. They are traditionalists in the sense that they continue the tradition of the so-called "conventional wisdom" of the field, a tradition that is characterized above all by service to practitioners. Professors of curriculum have tended to be former school people, and in fact, notices of vacancies on curriculum faculties still regularly call for schoolteaching experience. Curricularists, to an extent not obvious in certain of the other subfields of education (for example, in educational psychology and philosophy, even educational administration and the "helping services", especially recently) are former schoolpeople whose cultural and intellectual ties tend to be with the practitioner. They are less interested in basic research, theory development, parallel theoretical movement in other fields than in the reality of classrooms and school settings. The reason for this is, in large part, historical. Cremin suggests that it was

after superintendent Newlon's work in curriculum revision in the early nineteen-twenties in Denver that the need for a specialist became clear.[1] Efforts to meet this need were made in a time of an emerging scientism when so-called scientific techniques from business and industry were finding their way into educational theory and practice. That this newly-born field first appeared in departments of administration and secondary education also suggests that it was born in the practical concerns of school personnel. This focus on the practical continues to the present day, and provides, in part, the rationale for much work of a second group of curricularists. I term this group the "conceptual-empiricists".

The function, then, of traditional curriculum writing has been to guide, or in some conscious way to serve, those working in schools. What has tended to be thought of as curriculum theory, most notably Mr. Tyler's rationale, is theoretical only in the tenuous sense that it is abstract and usually at variance with what occurs in schools. Its intent is clearly to guide, to be of some assistance to those in institutional positions who are concerned with curricula. This is a broad concern, encompassing most teachers. In addition to teaching it tends also to include considerations of evaluation, sometimes supervision, as well as curriculum development and implementation. The boundaries of the field are fuzzy indeed.

Thematically it is not possible to generalize. From Tyler to Saylor and Alexander to the contemporary expression of this

genre in Daniel and Laurel Tanner's book (which attempts an overview of considerations imagined pertinent to a curriculum worker, and hence closer in conception to Taba and Saylor-Alexander than to Tyler), to the humanistic movement, including the work of such individuals as Fantini, Weinstein, and Graubard, is a broad territory indeed. Clearly they have no ideology in common. What they do share is an interest in working with schoolpeople, with revising the curriculum of schools. The writing tends to be journalistic, necessarily so, in order to be readily accessible to a constituency seeking quick answers to practical problems. The publications of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, on the whole, exemplify this writing. A.S.C.D. is, basically, the traditionalists' professional organization. That its membership is, in large part, made up of schoolpeople indicates again the close alliance between traditionalists and school personnel.

The present-day situation in the field is characterized well by Professor Schubert's title for this symposium. There is no longer a curriculum field, with shared views of its purpose. The very fact one sees "traditionalists" confirms this realization. Fifteen years ago, the curriculum field and traditionalists' writing were equivalents. Not so now. The traditionalists tend to be on the defensive with the conceptual-empiricists ascendent and reconceptualists as yet an unknown factor. The recent emergence of the American Educational Research Association as a more valued medium of professional expression for professors of

curriculum than the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development parallels this shift in power in the field. Why this demise of the curriculum field as it was known, why its coreless quality now? One factor seems clear. The leadership of the so-called reform movement of the nineteen sixties was outside the curriculum field. This bypass was a serious blow to the professional status of the field. If those whose work was curriculum development and implementation were called on primarily as consultants and then only rarely, then clearly their claim to specialized knowledge and expertise was questionable.

This can be overstated, but it needs to be said and examined carefully. In 1977, my sense is that numerically most on university and college faculties who regard themselves as curricularists are traditionalists. Publication in Educational Leadership and participation in A.S.C.D. conferences still count positively in the professional lives of many such individuals. But this tends not to be so for curricularists on education faculties at universities which are often viewed as outstanding centers for graduate studies in education. At such institutions publication in Educational Leadership is quite insignificant. In contrast, publication in A.E.R.A. journals clearly "breathes life" into the professional aspirations of contemporary curricularists. This distinction is not a simple matter of elitism. Rather, it is an indication of a historical-intellectual shift in the field which parallels in some respects the rise of psychology and the social sciences generally in the university. It indicates, as well, the influence of colleagues in the so-called cognate fields, who view educationists'

work according to criteria of research in their own fields. Especially now that some of the practical justification of curricularists (such as ready funds for nearly any kind of innovative curriculum proposal) have disappeared, their legitimacy is increasily based on the intellectual sophistication of their work. This significant shift is evident in educational philosophy, a field which more and more thinks of itself as a sub-field of philosophy, and less and less as a distinct field. One is pre-eminently a philosopher, secondarily, a philosopher of education. One is first a psychologist, with a research interest in teaching and curriculum.

This view -- that education is not a discipline in itself but an area to be studied by the disciplines -- is evident in the work of the conceptual-empiricists. George Posner's article (with Kenneth Strike) "A Categorization Scheme for Principles of Sequencing Content"[2] illustrates this loyalty to the parent discipline, in this case to behavioral science. A prefatory paragraph indicates that his view is a behavioral scientist's one, reliant on hypothesis testing and data collection and interpretation.

> We have very little information, based on hard data, regarding the consequences of alternative content sequences and will need a good deal more research effort before we are able to satisfactorily suggest how content <u>should</u> be sequenced. Our intention here is to consider the question, What are the alternatives?[3]

The article is a conceptual work, arranging into what the authors view as logically defensible content sequencing alternatives. In this way their work may be characterized as "conceptual-empirical".

In a recent essay, Decker Walker, another visible conceptual-empiricist, moves away from strict behavioral science as exemplified in Posner's work. This essay, or case study as he terms it, is more anthropological in its methodological character, a developing type of curriculum research which Walker's co-editor William A. Reid endorses.[4] (Anthropology, let us note, is still social science if not behavioral science; decidedly it is not one of the humanities.)

Taking his cue from Schwab, Walker argues that prescriptive curriculum theories, partly because they do not reflect the actual process of curriculum change, are not useful. Rather than focus on why curriculum developers did not follow, say, the Tyler rationale, Walker concentrates on how the developers in fact did work. He finds in his study little use for "objectives" and striking use for terms like "platform" and "deliberation". He concludes that curricularists probably ought to abandon the attempt to make actual curriculum work mirror prescriptive theories, accept "deliberation" as a core aspect of the development process, and apply our intellectual resources as a field toward improving the quality of deliberation and making it more effective.[5]

This work I find significant to the field in two ways. First it deals another hard blow to the Tyler rationale and its influence on the traditionalists. Second, Walker is moving away from behavioral science and toward work characteristic of the humanities. His work remains social science, but it is work closer to the work of reconceptualists than it is to that of Posner and his mentor Lauritz Johnson and to other mainstream conceptual-empirists. Walker retains the traditionalists' focus on the practical concerns

of schoolpeople and school curriculum, and no doubt he has and will spend a portion of his professional time on actual curriculum projects. Nonetheless, his methods seem more nearly those of the ethnomethodologist whose approaches do not easily fit the picture of conventional theories of the middle range as projected by individuals such as Robert Merton who has influenced so many sociological studies.

Also in the Walker-Reid book is work by another visible conceptual-empiricist, Ian Westbury. With his co-author Lynn McKinney, Professor Westbury studies the Gary, Indiana school system during the period 1940-1970. Like Walker's study of the art project, Westbury and McKinney's study is close to work in the humanities, closer than it seems to strict behavioral science. But it is historical work done in the service of generalization, work that has interest in the particular (the Gary district) as it contributes to understanding of the general. The "general" in this instance is the phenomena of stability and change, which the authors ". . . now believe are the two primary functions of the administrative structures which surround the schools . . ."[6] Finally what the study demonstrates is ". . . that a concern for goals without a concomitant concern for organizational matters addresses only a small part of the problem of conceiving new designs for schools."[7] This use of the specific to illustrate a general "law" is, of course, representative of a basic assumption of mainstream social science.

This concern for generalization is not abandoned in the work of reconceptualists. At the fourth conference at the University of

Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Professor Apple reported the results of a study he and a colleague conducted in a kindergarten, substantiating the claims he has made before regarding the social-political functions of classroom behavior. His case study is distinguished from the work of a typical conceptual-empiricist in two significant aspects: one, his acknowledged "value-laden" perspective, which is, two, a perspective that has an emancipatory intent. That is, in contrast to the canon of traditional social science which sees data collection, hypothesis substantiation and disconfirmation in the disinterested service of building a body of knowledge, a reconceptualist tends to see research as an inherently political as well as intellectual act. As such, it finally works to suppress, or to liberate, not only those who conduct the research, and those who are studied, but those outside of the academic subculture. Mainstream social and behavioral science research, while on the surface seemingly apolitical and strictly intellectual in nature and consequence, if examined more carefully can be seen as contributing to the maintenance of contemporary social-political order, or contributing to its dissolution. Apple and Marxists and neo-Marxists go further and accept a teleological view of historical movement, allying themselves with the underclasses whose final emergence from oppression is seen to be inevitable. A number of reconceptualists, while not Marxists, nonetheless accept some variation of this teleological historical view. At the least, nearly all accept that a political dimension of one's intellectual activity is inescapable.

This political emphasis distinguishes the work of Apple, Mann, Burton, Molnar, some of the work of Macdonald and Huebner, from the work of traditionalists and conceptual-empiricists. It is true that Walker and Reid in their Case Studies in Curriculum Change acknowledge that curriculum development is political, but the point is never developed, and never connected with a view of history and contemporary social order. Further, the focus of Walker's case study and of the other case studies in the book is limited to literal curriculum change, without historicizing the change, indicating its relation to contemporary historical movement generally. In the 1975 A.S.C.D. yearbook for example, edited by Macdonald and Zaret, with essays also by Huebner, Burton, Mann, and Apple, this situating of curriculum issues in the broad intellectual-historical currents of twentieth-century life is constant. Macdonald speaks, for instance, of technological rationality, an intellectual mode parallel to the ascendency of technology in human culture historically.

That book particularly speaks to schoolpeople. It is not that reconceptualists do not speak to the curriculum field's constituency. The intent differs. Their intent is not to guide curriculum development. It offers no prescriptions or rationales. The book functions as "consciousness raising". Because the difficulties reconceptualists identify are related to difficulties in the culture at large, they are not "problems" to be "solved". That conception of a "great society solution" is one created by technological rationality, which is itself the "problem". What is necessary is, in part, fundamental structural

change in the socio-economic order. That aspiration cannot be realized by "plugging into" the extant order. That is why an elective or two on Marx in high-school social studies classes, or the teaching of autobiography in English classes bring indifference and often alarm to most reconceptualists. That "plugging in", "co-opting" it was termed in the nineteen-sixties, tacitly accepts the social order as it is. What is necessary is a reconceptualization of what curriculum is, how it functions, and how it might function, and it is this commitment to a comprehensive critique and theory development that distinguishes the reconceptualist phenomenon.

The reconceptualization, it must be said, is fundamentally an intellectual phenomenon, not an interpersonal-affiliative one. Reconceptualists have no organized group. Individuals at work, while sharing certain themes and motives, do not tend to share any common interpersonal affiliation. In this one respect their work parallels that of the so-called romantic critics of the 1960's. But here any such comparison stops.

To understand more fully the efforts of the individuals involved in inquiry of this kind requires an understanding of metatheory and philosophy of science. Without such a grounding, it is difficult, if not impossible, for curricularists to see clearly their own work in the context of the growth of knowledge in general. Max van Manen's paper at the 1973 Milwaukee conference was a significant effort to analyze various structures of theoretic

knowledge as they relate to dominant modes of inquiry in the field of curriculum. His work builds on basic analyses undertaken by philosophers of science such as Radnitzky and Feyerabend. Much more work needs to be done along this line.

As an interpreter of metatheories, Bernstein recently analyzed, in detail, individuals at work in four areas -- the empirical, philosophical analysis, phenomenology and critical theory of society. He ends his study with this conviction:

> In the final analysis we are not confronted with exclusive choices: either empirical theory or interpretative theory or critical theory. Rather there is an internal dialectic in the restructuring of social and political theory: when we work through any one of these moments, we discover the others are implicated.[8]

I take this to mean, in part, that we need to learn to listen to one another and to hear. To the extent that we can, we affirm a synergetic field of curriculum, not one characterized by stasis and separatism. Some of the issues raised by the British sociologist David Silverman are germane here. As a prologue to more adequate social science theorizing, Silverman proposes that we learn how to read Castaneda's account of his apprenticeship to Don Juan in order that we might come to know the kinds of questions that need to be asked. He is convinced that mainstream conceptual-empiricists, regardless of field, do not now know what questions to ask and are, indeed, intolerant of reconceptualizations that differ from their own. Also useful in learning to view a panorama larger than that seen through the lens of the conceptual-empiricist are the books of two other British sociologists, Colin Fletcher and Julienne Ford.

Bernstein points to another problem we should be aware of as we try to see the work of the reconceptualists in perspective. It has to do with what might be called the fallacy of the view that we need to move through the "dark ages" to achieve maturity in an intellectual discipline. This smacks of an old nineteenth century positivistic belief. Yet, it prevails in the widespread assumption that if we work hard at, for example, the conceptual-empirical mode and achieve genuine rigor by using increasingly highly refined methods, the field will arrive at "maturity". It will, then, in Kuhn's term, have made a paradigm shift. Time and again, Berstein explodes this myth. But, it lingers in the field of curriculum studies, and there is often talk -- especially at A.E.R.A. conferences -- about our being at a stage where the natural sciences were some fifty years ago and that somehow we must move through that stage on to the next.

* * *

A note on my work. I see its emancipatory intent as central. There is unwarranted criticism that the autobiographical work Madeleine R. Grumet and I have developed is reducible to an upper-middle-class absortion with self. It is not mere journal keeping. It is conscious work to examine the ways in which the individual accepts the contemporary situation and remains enslaved to it. Oppression does not exist in the abstract; it exists in the lives of individuals. While work with one's peers, with groups generally can be essential in extricating oneself from

complicity with contemporary social-political oppression, emancipatory movement finally occurs individually. If it does not, if it is only acquisition of others' attitudes, hence a conceptual rearrangement, then no fundamental structural change has occurred, only change in content. The very structure of individual mind and psyche must be transformed if there is to be authentic historical movement. Thus the status of the psychoanalytic process in Habermas' scheme. There must be this individual transformation if there is to be social regeneration.

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Notes on the reconceptualization. There have been three conferences which addressed explicitly reconceptualization: Rochester, 1973; Xavier University of Cincinnati, 1974; University of Virginia, 1975. At the 1973 conference at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the term "reconceptualization" was dropped, although the conference chairman clearly saw the meeting in the context of the preceding ones. Further, any dispute over the term, itself, is not of fundamental importance. The point is that many of the papers read at the Milwaukee meeting functioned to reconceptalize curriculum. Clearly, as one examines the substance of the four conferences there are distinctive ideas and modes of inquiry that are common.

The fifth conference will be held at the Rochester Institute of Technology during the spring of next academic year, chaired by Professor Ronald E. Padgham, Chairman of the Department of Foundations, College of Fine and Applied Arts. Paper proposals

I understand are welcome. Selected papers from this meeting will be printed that fall by a journal now being organized. As well, a press is being established, with its first book due that academic year 1978-79. I see these efforts not to bring into being a new school of thought in any interpersonal sense, but rather, to foster the "internal dialectic" that Bernstein speaks of. From such a base, curriculum theory will unquestionably deserve a respected place in the intellectual disciplines.

Notes

1. Cremin, Lawrence. "Curriculum-Making in the United States" in Pinar, William (ed.) Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists, pp. 19-35.

2. Posner, George J. and Kenneth A. Strike. "A Categorization Scheme for Principles of Sequencing Content" in Review of Educational Research, Fall, 1976, Vol. 46, No. 4, pp. 665-690.

3. Ibid., p. 665.

4. Reid, William A. "The Changing Curriculum: Theory and Practice" in Reid, William A. and Decker F. Walker (eds) Case Studies in Curriculum Change, p. 245.

5. Walker, Decker F. "Curriculum Development in an Art Project", in Ibid., p. 92.

6. McKinney, W. Lynn and Ian Westbury. "Stability and Change: the Public Schools of Gary Indiana, 1940-70, in Ibid., p. 44.

7. Ibid., p. 50.

8. Bernstein, Richard J. The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory, p. 235.

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