

# Learning Through a Disciplined Curriculum Study Approach

## Implications for Educational Leadership

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I begin my discussion of this journal issue's theme by describing an important present moment in curriculum studies. I will then rethink this moment and briefly explore the implications of this new line of thought for leadership development. At the 2007 American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies' (AAACS) business meeting, Pinar (2007a) presents a paper arguing that the field of curriculum studies does not have a disciplinary structure but does contain key disciplinary features which he calls "curriculum disciplinaries." He identifies two key disciplinaries and examines how these disciplinaries can be used to create a curriculum studies "canon," which, in turn, can be used to advance curriculum studies. AAACS members unanimously decide to organize a Canon Task Force based on Pinar's argument, and the task force has been examining this topic over the past 3 years. There have been presentations of the task force deliberations at the 2008, 2009, and 2010 AAACS conferences.

The task force confronts a perplexing problem, which is explored in a dialogical exchange (Henderson & Kesson, 2009a, 2009b; Schubert, 2009a, 2009b). This problem can be summarized as a critical question: *Who identifies and conceptualizes the key curriculum disciplinaries?* This question has not yet been resolved; and, in fact, it may not have a solution. As a way out of this quandary, I want to rethink the question as follows: *Are there key curriculum disciplinaries that can be used to advance democratic educational leadership?* I take the position that there is an open set of curriculum disciplinaries and that, therefore, the problem that curriculum theorists face is to decide which disciplinaries address which educational purposes. I think Dewey's arguments for democratic integrity

in education provide the basis for a key educational purpose. Dewey (1939/1989) writes: “We have advanced far enough to say that democracy is a way of life. We have yet to realize that it is a way of personal life and one which provides a moral standard for personal conduct” (p. 101). In light of Dewey’s critical insight, I want to identify curriculum disciplinarity that best position educators to practice democratic “ethical fidelity” (Badiou, 2001).

Henderson and Gornik (2007) identify four such disciplinarity: (a) a philosophical questioning of democratic goodness in education, (b) a multitextual inquiry into the experiential implications of this questioning, (c) a deliberative decision making that supports sustainable democratic enactments, and (d) a “currere” (Pinar, 2004) self-examination of this educational work. They define the curriculum leader as an educator who embraces this four-fold discipline and then seeks ways to inspire other educators to engage in this interrelated questioning, inquiring, deliberating, and self-examining. They recently collaborated with a team of teacher and administrative leaders to create a website that introduces, explains, and illustrates this understanding of curriculum leadership. The website can be retrieved at: [www.ehhs.kent.edu/cli](http://www.ehhs.kent.edu/cli).

I am now ready to take a further step with this line of inquiry. I am currently collaborating with Kathleen Kesson on rethinking Tyler’s (1949) “rationale” from this disciplinarity frame of reference. We think this is a productive way of proceeding for four reasons. First of all, Tanner and Tanner (2007) note that, “Tyler’s [rationale] has been widely used in curriculum courses and widely discussed in the curriculum literature from midcentury to the present day. Although various modifications have been proposed, Tyler’s explication of the curriculum paradigm has not been fundamentally changed” (p. 134). In effect, Tyler’s rationale is still the dominant problem solving referent in the curriculum field (Null, 2008). Secondly, though current educational practitioners may not be aware of Tyler’s rationale, they are generally still immersed in an “operational ideology” (Eisner, 1992, p. 306) consistent with, and perhaps informed by, this rationale. Thirdly, we agree with Kliebard (1992) that there is something “imperishable” about Tyler’s rationale (p. 164), which we think is the way Tyler works with the notion of ‘learning-through-experience’ to create a *purpose–experience–organization–evaluation* framework. Though we want to establish critical distance from Tyler’s behavioral proceduralism, we don’t want to reject the learning-through-experience dynamic that underlies his framework. Finally, we resonate with Barth’s (2008) ‘leader-as-learner’ interpretation: “In our profession, especially, one is a learner and THEREBY a leader. The moral authority of the educational leader comes first and foremost from being a learner” (p. x; author’s emphasis).

We will integrate this leader-as-learner interpretation into our rethinking of Tyler’s framework, and we will proceed by supporting the ‘canonical’ study of the four disciplinarity in Henderson and Gornik’s (2007) text. In effect, we are creating a study book that presents a dynamic and democratic reinterpretation of

curriculum purposing, experiencing, organizing, and evaluating. Pinar (2007b) introduces two general disciplinaritys which he describes as “more intellectual dispositions than inviolate orderings” (p. xiii). His “verticality” refers to the disciplined effort to acquire a historical understanding of curriculum studies with reference to the field’s leading ideas, while his “horizontality” refers to the disciplined effort to understand curriculum work in the present moment.

Our curriculum discipline book is a study montage of diverse textual sources that facilitate *vertical* and *horizontal* understandings of the philosophical questioning, multitextual inquiring, and deliberative organizing that I have outlined above. We are working with a notion of *diagonal* understanding in the construction of our currere canon since this allows us to acknowledge the recursive, loopy “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) characteristic of growing self-understandings (Henderson & Kesson, 2009a). We picture the diagonal understandings as cutting across the vertical and horizontal understandings.

Our book project is based on a hopeful vision. We envision a day when educational policy makers will recognize that P–12 educators can function as professionals who practice a particular applied scholarship. The educators we have in mind embrace the comprehensive study of curriculum-based pedagogy for the purpose of embodying and enacting democratic ethical fidelity; and because they engage in this disciplined learning-through-experience, their judgments can generally be trusted and respected. These educators don’t need to be managed. We recognize that the realization of this professional vision will require a particular type of educational leadership, and we want to foster the development of such leaders.

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