

Curriculum Theory: A Recent History

Janet L. Miller
Battelle Memorial Institute

*Everything both resembles and differs from everything
else: resembles it at least in existing; differs, or there
would be no multiplicity to compare.*

Huston Smith

Pausing to reflect upon the resemblances and to compare the multiplicities contained within the immediate history of curriculum theory is apropos at this particular point in time. The Rochester Institute of Technology Curriculum Theory Conference marks five years since the initial gathering of people who, although espousing varied perspectives and approaches to curriculum theory, shared a mutual commitment to extending life to a field which had been pronounced moribund.

Noting the Rochester Institute of Technology conference, then, as a temporal symbol of progression, I wish to utilize the framework of preceding curriculum theory conferences to briefly chronicle past developments, to describe present states, and to propose some contexts and directions which might characterize the spirit of future evolvments in the area of curriculum theory.

The strong traditional background, from which our work in curriculum has emerged, greatly influences attempts to integrate the objective realms of the disciplines, of scientific inquiry, and of a technological society with the subjective realms of heightened consciousness, of self knowledge, and of authentic relationships. The tradition for years within the curriculum field has been the Tyler rationale, modified by Taba and extended by Saylor and Alexander, and others, which sought to guide practitioners in the development, design, implementation, and evaluation of materials and methods within the classroom. Most people view the field of curriculum in this fashion, and most curriculum theory has conformed to this particular mode.

A smaller group of theorists may be identified as empiricists who utilize the models of the social sciences for their investigations. Duncan

and Frymier, at the Ohio State University Conference of 1967, called for theory within this vein, and this stance has been promoted by such people as Eisner, Johnson and Beauchamp.

The third and smallest group of theorists are those who are neither proposing guidelines for practice nor are doing research in the empirical sense of the word. These people are "creating the new." They are moving into realms of thought and methodology which heretofore have not been applied to curriculum work.

That curriculum theory has not settled into one particular mode of inquiry is apparent; indeed, as Macdonald has noted, ". . . there are no generally accepted and clear-cut criteria to distinguish curriculum theory and theorizing from other forms of writing in education."¹ However, needs for fresh approaches and divergent ways of thinking were noted in Chicago in 1965 when Elizabeth Maccia, working with the commission on curriculum theory established by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, identified four distinct modes of curriculum theorizing: these she termed event theory, formal theory, valuational theory and praxiological theory.²

Earlier, in curriculum theory conferences at the University of Chicago in 1947, at the Ohio State University in 1967, and at Stanford University in 1969, one may find evidence of these various modes of inquiry. Of particular significance is B. Othanel Smith's identification, at the 1947 Chicago conference, of four aspects of the educational task in the present era. Smith's call for an adequate normative position includes the need for a new value orientation, the need for collective social goals which give meaning to individual achievement and effort, the need for conceptualization of human nature based upon psychological and sociological theory, and the need for new patterns of thinking about social policies and actions to replace the obsolete habit of thinking in a linear and compartmentalized fashion. Pinar notes Smith's paper as a foreshadowing of work that appeared at the 1973 Rochester Conference.³

The more specific delineations of the purposes of curriculum theorizing, those of developmental, empirical, and reconceptual, were named in James Macdonald's 1971 paper, "Curriculum Theory," which appeared in

the JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH.

The first group, whose work is developmental in nature, sees theory "as a guiding framework for applied curriculum development and research and as a tool for evaluation of curriculum development."⁴ Thus, prescription and guidance of practical activity can result from such curriculum theorizing.

Macdonald states that the purpose of the scientific mode of inquiry is primarily conceptual in nature. Rather than testing the effectiveness and efficiency of a curriculum prescription, the research derived from this empirical approach would be used to validate curriculum variables and relationships.⁵

Theorizing becomes a creative intellectual task for the third group of people working in the field. They are not intending to prescribe or provide a base for empirically testable sets of principles and relationships, but rather are looking for fresh ways of perceiving curriculum. In this process, such persons may criticize existing conceptual schema as well as attempt to develop new orientations and ways of talking about curriculum.⁶

In speaking of these three general areas within which curriculum theorists may be identified, Macdonald carefully notes that it may be possible for a theorist to operate in all three realms upon different occasions, obviously depending upon various professional tasks. Thus, the theorist's intent must be analyzed as carefully as, and as inherent to, the specific piece of curriculum theory.

Macdonald then discusses, among the concerns of curriculum theory, ways in which theory may be categorized as oriented toward statements about knowledge, statements about the curriculum realities, and statements about valued activity. Macdonald states that epistemology may be too limited a base for adequate curriculum theory, although such theorists as Bruner, Schwab and Phenix have called for reconceptualizing of the structures of the disciplines and the modes of disciplined inquiry. In questioning the adequacy of only dealing with the nature of knowledge, Macdonald notes that "Questions about the relevance of social, human, and personal qualities would appear to lead to broader vistas in order to cope comfortably with curriculum decisions."⁷

Reality-oriented statements, which focus upon the cultural, social, and personal contexts of the nature of living and being, may be used

to identify the basic units of curriculum with which to build conceptual systems. However, Macdonald again warns that one must note the intent of the conceptual model. The intent of the Goodlad and Richter model, says Macdonald, is to control, explain, and describe. He then cites his own model which views "actions" rather than the "decisions" of the Goodlad-Richter model, as the central unit of curriculum theory. Macdonald claims that his model does not seek the type of control of the curriculum processes that a conceptual model which is limited to rational decision-making processes may produce. By attempting "to explain activity found in relevant contexts of schooling and to describe the various levels of activity that go on,"⁸ Macdonald furthers his model by hinting at their relationships. Here he specifies the importance of descriptive and explanatory phenomena in developing long-range usefulness of a model rather than compromising to short-term needs for control of the curriculum processes.

In discussing the need for development of models of long-range usefulness, Macdonald touches upon the "nature of the influence of changing climates of broad social and political circumstances" as bases for statements about curriculum realities.

*The question of whether an adequate curriculum theory can be formulated without a sophisticated awareness of political phenomena provides a dimension to theorizing that has only been noted in passing, hinted at, or broadly sketched in the past. Some theorists are beginning to wonder if these political influences may not be far more important than they generally have been thought to be.*⁹

Certainly, these forces come into play in a discussion of curriculum designs as value-oriented statements. Even though designs may attempt to project theoretically based patterns of experience as desirable, the designers must still contend with the problem of the basic unit around which designs are constructed, in which the value commitment is central.¹⁰

In speaking to those people for whom curriculum theorizing is a creative intellectual work, Macdonald notes that such individuals may choose to criticize existing conceptual schema and/or to develop new

means by which to view and to explore all that is named curriculum. The separate task of criticism and of creation later become critical distinctions in Pinar's structural organization of his book, *CURRICULUM THEORIZING: THE RECONCEPTUALISTS*. Thus, Macdonald's initial naming of these tasks become significant when viewed within the framework of reconceptualization.

In mentioning the political forces which may be important in the development of curriculum theory, and by noting the focus upon student unrest and politics in relation to curriculum in the work of John Steven Mann and Michael Apple in particular, Macdonald points to one of the issues which has become paramount in the evolvement of curriculum theorizing. Increasing support has developed for this point of view, and again, Macdonald's ability to focus upon critical areas of concern for the field of curriculum is evidenced in this foreshadowing of a major emphasis within contemporary curriculum theorizing.

Finally, Macdonald's call for broader vistas to encompass social, human and personal qualities as bases for curriculum theory foreshadows the utilization by some Reconceptualist theorizers of existentialism and phenomenology as foundational tools in the analysis of the nature of educational experience.

Clearly, James Macdonald's paper, "Curriculum Theory," is of great importance; he is able to give form and definition to an area of educational writing known as curriculum theory which heretofore has appeared as a rather amorphous mass of unrelated writings about vaguely identifiable realms of phenomena. Further, Macdonald's analysis of the state of the field provides a foundational base for the emerging foci of those theorists who are committed to a reconceiving of the nature of curriculum theory itself. Macdonald's analysis brings a coherent ordering to the role of theorizing and serves as a forerunner to the revisioning of the field.

Situated within these emerging forms of curriculum theory, then, and united by their concerns with the apparent fragmentary nature of educational experience, educators met at the University of Rochester during May 3-5, 1973. William Pinar chaired the conference, and James Macdonald, Maxine Greene, Dwayne Huebner, Robert Starratt, Donald Bateman, William Pilder, and William Pinar presented papers. These appeared in a collection entitled *HEIGHTENED CONSCIOUSNESS*,

CULTURAL REVOLUTION, AND CURRICULUM THEORY, edited by Pinar, and this collection represents the first public indication of a move to reconceive the purposes and nature of curriculum theory.

Pinar, in his prefatory remarks, discusses the implications for a conference entitled "Heightened Consciousness, Cultural Revolution, and Curriculum Theory." In attempting to answer the question, "What is curriculum theory?", Pinar notes that such a question . . . *belies more than the adolescence of a field and that stage's "search for identity."* *In one sense, it is the cultural dilemma writ small, the manifestation in professional education of the macrocosmic uncertainty. The insistence with which the question is asked indicates the need for more than an answer; it calls for some form of affirmation, so that a question is less crucial, if not inane.*¹¹

The need to examine educational experience in light of the radical changes in the contemporary culture of North America provides a shift in emphasis from the "social needs" orientation of the aforementioned 1947 Chicago Conference to "value gestalts" which include existentialism as a philosophical base, thus providing a relation to the inner focus of the cultural revolution, and a way of attending to Macdonald's call for theory which encompasses social, human and personal qualities. Because the cultural revolution has been viewed as a revolution of consciousness, theorists who are examining the nature of contemporary educational experience must focus upon the inner states of those who are involved in the process of learning as well as upon actions which follow from those states.

Intending the theme of the Rochester Conference to provide a possible point of synthesis for work in progress, Pinar comments upon themes developed at the meeting. *Huebner and Greene have worked persistently on questions of meaning and language, and both extended their positions in ways that raised interesting questions for practitioners and theorizers alike. My work, which has been exploring a phenomenological approach that draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory, offered a partial explanation of the conference theme. Bateman and Pilder offered political and cultural analyses. Bateman drew on the work of Freire to*

*support this belief in the need to "demythologize" curriculum. By implication, Pilder makes a compelling case for the creation of intentional communities which might foster what he terms "mutual indwelling". These two theorists urge a fundamental reexamination of the relationship between curriculum, the school, and society. All papers attempt, in some fashion, to deal with internal experience. . . while individual paths may differ markedly, ultimately we seek the same, and that has something to do with the cultivation of wisdom. This, finally . . . recalls the theme of consciousness and cultural revolution.*¹²

Discerning the shape of future reform as indicated by themes in the Rochester papers proved to be a difficult yet important task. Pinar names three areas which emerged as dominant areas of concern: reform must be theoretical, political, and psychological. It must involve a reworking of the language employed to describe all phenomena linked to curriculum; it must involve a politically sensitive approach to schooling relationships as well as to analysis of curriculum materials; it must involve a shift in focus to one's inner states.¹³ Macdonald's belief in social, human, and personal qualities as bases for theory was beginning to be realized.

The atmosphere which prevailed at the 1973 Conference must be noted, for many in attendance attribute much of what has evolved since within the area of curriculum theory, albeit characterized by ideological polarities and resistance to labeling and categorization, to the spirit of a shared quest for a "new grounding for the professional curriculum field."¹⁴ Maxine Greene notes that the Conference "escaped the usual convention spirit,"¹⁵ and Paul Klohr describes the potential he felt for building a new paradigm for curriculum theory: . . . *it is the kind of excitement I experienced during the very early days of A.S.C.D. when a relatively small group came together to spearhead fresh developments in the field of curriculum. This was before A.S.C.D. became so large and diverse in its aims that in order to survive it felt obliged to offer a bit of everything for everyone at all times and, consequently, became completely submerged in the so-called conventional wisdom. It is the kind of feeling rekindled one had at the pioneer Granville Conference on creativity that Ross Mooney sponsored before "creativity" became the password for every modish curriculum change, however trivial.*¹⁶

Cerntainly, then, that sense of excitement, of commitment, has sustained the essential work of those who have participated in the yearly conferences since 1973. However, to declare that unity or alignment of perspective has occurred would be totally incorrect.

In October of 1974, Timothy Riordan chaired the Curriculum Theory Conference at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio; Greene, Huebner, Macdonald and Pinar were joined by Burton, Klohr, Mooney, Riordan, Shuchat-Shaw, and Williams in presenting papers at this second conference. The themes of the Rochester Conference, those of heightened consciousness and cultural revolution were in evidence, and indeed, appeared in bolder and more specific language than before. Burton and Williams specifically pressed for political awareness; Pinar's paper, dealing in depth with evolving methodology for work with "self," and Mooney's challenge of dealing with curriculum for life appeared at odds with the social and political concerns of several others at the Conference.

One way of understanding the necessity and inevitability of apparent tensions developing among these theorists is to note the common threads which run through their work. In his careful assessment of the state of the field, Paul Klohr presented to the people attending the Xavier Conference important guidelines for viewing the work of those within the third category of the Macdonald analysis: these people are engaging in fresh modes of inquiry in order to create the new. Conflicting ideas concerning ways and means of such creation are inherent within the initial stages of development. Klohr identified a framework within which one could trace common elements that characterize the works in progress of those interested in a reconceptualization of the field.

1. *A holistic, organic view is taken of man and his relation to nature.*
2. *The individual becomes the chief agent in the construction of knowledge; that is, he is a culture creator as well as culture bearer.*
3. *The curriculum theorist draws heavily on his own experiential base as method.*

4. *Curriculum theorizing recognizes as major resources the preconscious realms of experience.*
5. *The foundation roots of their theorizing lie in existential philosophy, phenomenology and radical psychoanalysis, also drawing on humanistic reconceptualizations of such cognate fields as sociology, anthropology, and political science.*
6. *Personal liberty and the attainment of higher levels of consciousness become central values in the curriculum process.*
7. *Diversity and pluralism are celebrated in both social ends and in the proposals projected to move toward these ends.*
8. *A reconceptualization of supporting political-social operations is basic.*
9. *New language forms are generated to translate fresh meanings – metaphors, for example.¹⁷*

Klohr's analysis emphasizes the diversity of the foci as well as of the methodology employed as means of explication. Certainly, these people do not work as a cohesive group, and yet the binding elements evolve from a commitment to betterment of individual and collective educational experience.

The third meeting of people who share this commitment occurred at the University of Virginia in October, 1975. Charles Beegle chaired the Conference which was entitled "Reconceptualizing Curriculum Theory." The dichotomy of thought and approach appeared in the papers especially of the general session speakers. Pinar, attempting to refine his autobiographical stance with a method he has termed "currere," delved more deeply into subjective areas. He spoke of Eastern philosophies and meditation as well as literature as means of introspection and self-awareness. Timothy Riordan took a more "political" stance and insisted upon the necessity of taking action in the world.

The tenor of the meeting was set by these two general stances, and, although attempts were made by various participants to encourage dialogue which must accompany the free exchange of ideas, many felt that at this third meeting much was left unsaid concerning the apparent polarity of ideas represented at the Conference.

The fourth conference of the Reconceptualization took place at the

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, November 11-14, 1976, and was co-chaired by Alex Molnar and John Zahorik. The planners, in their organization letter, acknowledged that the three preceding conferences at Rochester, Xavier, and Virginia had established a solid foundation for continued work.

Major papers were presented by Ralph Tyler, James Macdonald, Dwayne Huebner, Michael Apple, Elliot Eisner, and Bernice Wolfson. Following each major paper, a panel of three respondents questioned the speaker. Though formal in nature, these presentations enabled not only the panel, but also the members of the audience, to respond to salient points made by the major speakers.

In addition, the conference featured sixteen concurrent presentation and dialogue sessions, allowing many to participate and to share views of the nature of curriculum reconceptualization.

Again, the political and subjective strains of thought colored the stances of those in attendance. Again there was no general agreement concerning method or approach to problems inherent in the field of curriculum.

The Kent State University Curriculum Theory Conference, held in November 1977, and chaired by Richard Hawthorne, continued the dialogue as well as the acknowledgement of conflicting ideologies and foundational bases from which people were working. Divergent views continued to be expressed by those identified with the Reconceptualist movement, and resistance by some to the label of Reconceptualist was apparent.

For a further understanding of these divergent views, consider Pinar's second book, *CURRICULUM THEORIZING: THE RECONCEPTUALISTS*. One basis for conflict of views lies in Pinar's organizational scheme of the collected papers, as well as his claims for that particular segment of thinking which he labels "postcritical."

The book is divided into four sections: 1) the state of the field, 2) historical criticism, 3) political and methodological criticism, and 4) post-critical theorizing. The conflict exists between the third and fourth areas.

The emphasis of the work of the "postcriticals" in the collection -- Huebner, Macdonald, Greene, Phenix, Pilder, Murphy, Pinar, Willis, and Shuchat-Shaw -- is "self" and the tools utilized to explicate self are those of existentialism and phenomenology. The purpose of the postcritical thinkers, defined by Pinar, is "to understand" one's self as well as the nature of educational experience. The modes of inquiry are literary, historical, and philosophical, and Pinar's work, especially, demonstrates the strong influence of psychoanalytic theory.

William Burton, in a correspondence with Pinar in November 1974¹⁸, states that Pinar's definition of postcritical -- a concern with transcendence and consciousness, a moving away from the criticism of the old into a creation of the new -- obscures and minimizes the importance and necessity for political criticism and action. Burton states that the existential-phenomenological approach which characterizes Pinar's "post-critical" thinking is an evasion of the reality of political oppression which characterizes life in the 1970s. Reliance upon such existential-phenomenological methodology, Burton asserts, mystifies the issues and can only lead to a dead-end. Pinar's reply¹⁹ is that all acts must begin with self, and that recognition of self and of one's place in the world becomes political ultimately, for one is then free to act once one has understanding; one's experience may then be placed in its political, social, and psychological dimensions.

Burton's criticism of the concepts which characterize the "postcritical" modes of thinking are representative of a number of those who are concerned with the realities of oppression.

The 1975 A.S.C.D. yearbook, *SCHOOLS IN SEARCH OF MEANING*, is perhaps the most concise and public statement thus far of curriculum people who are concerned with the political and socioeconomic structure of our society and with the effects of such structures upon schooling.

Co-edited by James Macdonald and Esther Zaret, the yearbook contains writings by Huebner, Apple, Mann, Macdonald, all of whom appear in Pinar's *CURRICULUM THEORIZING: THE RECONCEPTUALISTS*, as well as writings by Burton and Zaret. Their basic stance is clear: for people to find meaning in their lives in America in the 1970s, they must

be aware of the role that schooling plays in maintaining the status quo of the working and ruling classes. Schools, through tracking and grading, function to let people know their places within society, and contribute to the "domestication" of their consciousness. The authors point to the necessity of an analysis of schooling based on class interest. They advocate the continual asking of the questions, "In whose interest is this being done?" and "Who decides?"

The yearbook is a strong call to action; the authors, in the conclusion of the book, list steps to take, such as gathering small groups of students together to teach them the tools of dialectical analysis, the heightened awareness which is needed to move out of opposed states.²⁰

Macdonald, as part of a larger work in progress, spoke in 1975 of the delineations among theorists in another way; using Habermas' work as a template, Macdonald named control theories, hermeneutic theories, and critical theories as major identifiable realms. The work of Tyler is representative of control theory; Huebner, Greene, and Pinar fall within the hermeneutic tradition; Apple and Mann's works are within the realm of critical theory as identified by Macdonald.²¹ Macdonald also, at times, has referred to the major reconceptualist viewpoints as two major orientations, those of "existential" and "structural."²²

The fact that much attention has been paid to the various "namings" of the realms within which curriculum theorists are working indicates, I believe, a positive phenomenon; the point is not that we must reach agreement or consensus about the named context of our work, but rather that we are infusing life into the curriculum field by our very careful attentiveness to the specific definitions of our various works.

In reviewing, then, the recent history of curriculum theory, it becomes clear that we do resemble one another in a larger sense in that we are committed to the importance of curriculum theory as an evolutionary phenomenon; we acknowledge the reciprocal relationship of our work to the accompanying concerns of the nature of the substantive and syntactical structures of the curriculum field. Our diversities provide us with possibilities for evolving alterations of conceptual and theoretical representations of the realities that we construct.

Thus, we acknowledge our differences, and allow the framing of the

conflict to provide us a means for movement within a comprehensive whole. As Macdonald notes: *I do not believe that there is any fundamental contradiction in the long run between those theorists who advocate a personal change position and those who advocate a social change orientation in terms of changing consciousness toward a liberating praxis. This assumes that the social approach does involve a highly structured set of "new" meanings, nor the personal growth approach being structured to a highly individualistic orientation without meaning for communal living. Neither approach need be exaggerated to the point of exclusion of the other.*²³

Clearly, the major issues which comprise the area of curriculum theory are diverse; thus, in some respects, concentration upon attempts to prove correctness or exclusiveness of one particular approach or stance threatens to stall movement and growth within the field. In order to create a living and vital field, we must acknowledge the varied dimensions which constitute liberative work; rather than becoming entrenched in one perspective, and risking rigidity and immobility in the name of conviction, we must open our work to the possibilities of examining the nature of educational experience within the contexts of the cultural, the political, the economic, and the personal. We must view our work as a means by which we may communicate our chosen concerns. At the same time, we need to listen to the voice of the individual as well as to the voice of the collective. To accomplish this, we must not work in isolation. One point crystallizes as we pause to review curriculum theory's recent history: the calls for open exchange, for dialogue, for acknowledgement of the life-giving energies of a variety of perspectives appear as immediate and clear priorities.

Thus, acknowledging issues and priorities which have characterized the work of contemporary curriculum theorists, I now turn to possible future directions and concerns. What integrations and evolving alterations, then, might provide a grounding for our future work in curriculum theory?

One framework in which our multiplicities may be shared is the continuation of annual meetings. A foundational requirement for meaningful continuation of our work is that we speak to one another of our under-

standings of the crucial aspects within the curriculum field. As previously noted, it is not necessary or even desirable that we agree upon the methodologies with which we approach our work, nor do we demand a united front, so to speak, as we attempt to interact with our contemporaries who are working within other areas of the curriculum field as well as within other educational contexts. We must, however, provide time to listen and to speak with one another if we, in any way, hope to contribute to the "multidisciplinary transformation of our understanding of fundamental issues in the human disciplines" by offering "our work in ways which will permit others to make syntheses",²⁴ for themselves, for the curriculum field, and ultimately for the field's contribution to the nature and quality of educational experience in the United States.

It is within the spirit of shared concerns, then, and within the realization that "we shall not have achieved a better curricular theory until we are able to say better things to each other on our own plateau . . ." ²⁵, that THE JOURNAL OF CURRICULUM THEORIZING emerges. The purposes of the journal are two-fold: 1) the journal will provide an open forum for curriculum theorists to explore the various cultural, political, and psychological dimensions of the field, and 2) the journal also will acknowledge the variety of perspectives which characterize these various dimensions by printing criticism of such work.

By sponsoring annual conferences, occasional smaller meetings, and a small book series in curriculum theory, THE JOURNAL OF CURRICULUM THEORIZING hopes not only to increase the frequency and intensity of dialogue in the field, but also to enhance that sense of excitement which allows us to move beyond our multiplicities in order to share in those larger dimensions, those "feelings rekindled" which unite us.

The tracing of recent past events, then, acknowledges a spirit of commitment to the betterment of educational experience. As we now move from this plateau, from this pause which has allowed us to remove ourselves momentarily from the motions of our work in order to reflect and assess, it is this prevailing spirit of commitment which provides the opening to future integrations of our work with all those committed to the liberation of the human potential.

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