

JCT Today

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[I]s it possible to advance without any idea of where one has been?

Russell Jacoby (2008, B6)

JCT started¹ in the late 1970s as the site of scholarship that functioned to reconceptualize U.S. curriculum studies. By the late 1980s it was regarded by many as the main site of avant-garde scholarship not only in curriculum studies but in education more generally. During the last decade, JCT has remained a distinctive journal devoted to provocative scholarship and critical commentary inspired by those intellectual practices and traditions associated with the humanities and the arts. Under the editorship of Marla Morris, JCT realized its promise as a profoundly provocative—and (in gratitude to Mary Aswell Doll), a beautifully produced—scholarly journal.

What role can JCT play today? Is it more provocative scholarship we need now? Is avant-garde scholarship in jeopardy, requiring editorial support? Is there a paradigm shift underway in U.S. curriculum studies, requiring a site for scholarship not yet recognizable as the “new” curriculum studies? My answers to these questions are, of course, implied. While provocative scholarship is always needed, at the moment it hardly seems in jeopardy. Indeed, sometimes it appears avant-garde scholarship has become the norm; many act eager to ride the “next wave” to visibility. And while the internationalization of curriculum studies may someday lead to second paradigm shift, that does not seem imminent. In contrast to other nationally distinctive curriculum studies fields (Pinar 2003; forthcoming), U.S. curriculum studies seems a field besieged, thanks in part to the Bush Administration’s efforts to silence it.² The Bush Administration’s assault on schools and colleges of education has (as mentioned in footnote 2) precipitated horizontal violence³ by colleagues in other specializations, several of whom have questioned the intellectual distinctiveness of curriculum studies, questioned even the continued existence of curriculum studies programs. Add to these undermining conditions an internal fragmentation fueled, in part, by the excesses of identity politics (Pinar in press), and the “next moment” (Malewski in press) seems less an opportunity for intellectual advancement than a test of survival, less a time for laying the groundwork for an intellectually dynamic future than it is a nightmare from which we cannot seem to awaken.

What role might JCT play in such a turbulent time?⁴ How might it support the scholarly efforts of those students and scholars courageously concerned with the curriculum: the intellectual and organizational center of educational institutions? How might JCT encourage the intellectual advancement of the academic field of curriculum studies thereby contributing to its survival? Strangely, these questions echo those I faced when founding JCT thirty years ago. While the causes of disciplinary distress have changed, the fact of a field under stress remains, punctuated by a brief (and, as it soon became obvious, illusory) moment of consolidation with the publication of *Understanding Curriculum*. Thirty years ago the crisis was the loss of the field's fundamental idea of itself: institutional curriculum development. If curriculum professors were not in schools engaged in institutional curriculum development, what would they do? (Recall that Joseph Schwab (1983) actually subtitled an article "Something for Curriculum Professors to Do.") During that earlier emergency, Herbert Kliebard (2000 [1970a]) decried the ahistorical and atheoretical character of the field, decrying its bureaucratism (2000 [1971]) and critiquing the then-hegemonic Tyler Rationale [2000 [1970b]). That critique was central to the paradigm shift that occurred during the 1970s as the field's reconceived its *raison d'être* from developing to understanding curriculum.

Using Kliebard's critique as evaluative criteria, any impartial observer would acknowledge that, in theoretical terms, curriculum studies has made significant progress in the post-Reconceptualization period (1980-). The judgment regarding the second measure of intellectual advancement—the field's historicity—is less obvious. Despite the publication of significant historical scholarship, curriculum studies remains insufficiently historicized. Ours is hardly the only discipline to disavow its past and ignore its great figures.⁵ But it is disconcerting that there remain curriculum studies scholars who fail to position curriculum history as central in their research and teaching, as indeed the perquisite to the field's intellectual advancement. Despite recent efforts to resuscitate Tyler (see, for instance, Kridel and Bullough 2007, 13, 96), the Rationale remains discredited and irrelevant. The instrumentalism it expressed, however, remains hegemonic.

Today, it is "social justice" that constitutes the elusive⁶ curricular objective to which curriculum history is disavowed as indicative of only exclusion. Given the apparently uncritical acceptance of "social justice"—the successor to discourses of "practice" to which "counter-reformationists" like Wraga (1999) pledged allegiance as they refused the reality of the Reconceptualization—the field remains preoccupied with an elusive object beyond its grasp. The fantasy of chasing an elusive object—providing an illusory unity to a field now widely perceived to be fragmented⁷—condemns those who follow it to frustration and self-doubt. Our common faith today is not "social justice" or "practice" or even that sepulcher "the school"⁸ at which many still worship, praying for a "second coming" after which we will, once again, exercise jurisdiction over institutional curriculum development. The reality of the present moment can entertain no such fantasy of disciplinary "rapture." The object that in fact informs contemporary curriculum studies is no scenario of deliverance; it affords no illusion of "social justice" or, more modestly, of improved "practice." The "object" that is not elusive, that we do not have to chase but, in fact, can hold in our hands is the scholarship of those who have gone before us: the work of our predecessors. It is this scholarship that informs our own, including our obsession with what we cannot accomplish. What we curriculum studies scholars have in common is not the present: it is the past.

That past is no abstraction. Nor is it comprised of body parts: our predecessors are not "shoulders on which we are standing," prosthetic props to our own narcissistic achievement. Our

predecessors render our very presence possible; they provide the medium through which we articulate our educational experience and midwife experience yet to come. Even when we do not quote them directly, they are imprinted in what we think, even what we imagine we have thought on our own, in what is wedded (we are sure) only to the present, that which is presumably unprecedented, yes original. But when we quote our predecessors we hear their words in ours. And quote them we must: so doing renders their insight audible, enabling us to understand what we can barely stand to hear—and see—is there, staring at us.

The reality we confront disables us from comprehending it by rendering us incapable of memory. Not a decade after Nixon had sanctioned conservatives' long tortuous march "back to the basics" the great curriculum theorist Dwayne E. Huebner (1999, 231) asked: "Fellow educators—are we not lost? Do we know where we are, remember where we have been, or foresee where we are going?" A decade before "resistance" became political theorists battle-cry (Pinar et al. 1995, 252ff.), there was Huebner—at a speech to schoolteachers at ASCD at which I was present—demanding that they, that *we*, recognize the reality around us. There he was, asking if we were not lost in the present. Horrified by what was happening to the profession (seven years later he would leave Teachers College for the Divinity School at Yale), he was impassioned, calling upon us, like the prophet he was, to come to our senses, to *remember*. We did not choose our situation, but we can, he implored us, choose our reply to it. That is, if we know its history. Without history there is no future.

I am stirred still by his courage, his insight, his identificatory embrace of schoolteachers' plight that many, immersed in the present, did not yet fully appreciate, that many still do not fully appreciate. Is Huebner not speaking to us still, reeling from the assault on the profession by the Bush Administration and its stand-ins, conservative (or is it just predatory) colleagues emboldened by our vulnerability, demanding more power, budget, and program? How can we not ask our students to reread Huebner as he bravely faces a field after Tyler, as he refuses Schwab's disciplinary structures and institutional deliberation, as he positions spirituality as central in educational experience?

In order to participate in a field that is simultaneously theoretical and historical, is it not obvious that one's intellectual labor must begin in, at some point return to, the past, threading into present circumstances that complicated conversation underway for almost a century?⁹ That is how a field advances intellectually: working through disciplinary problems experienced by previous generations (Messer-Davidow et al. 1993; Anderson and Valente 2002). Without knowledge of its intellectual history, a field cannot advance. The concept of canon—that core of disciplinary knowledge without which a field does not exist—suffers from its appropriation by conservatives in decades past, but, as Edward Said (2004, 25) points out, the concept of canon is "far from being a rigid tablet of fixed rules and monuments bullying us from the past." It is, in fact, "a contrapuntal form ... expressing motion, playfulness, discovery, and ... invention" (2004, 25). Like jazz¹⁰ musicians, disciplinary specialists incorporate knowledge from the past to create innovative intellectual practices, in anticipation of a future "not yet"¹¹ but rendered audible through the present.

By insisting that manuscripts submitted to JCT thread present concerns through the past, JCT can contribute to the intellectual advancement of curriculum studies. It would not be for the first time: indeed, JCT was born amidst intense hostility from senior colleagues who refused to accept that significant shifts in the field were underway. Once again, JCT can provide a site for scholarship that, in "bringing memory forward" (Strong-Wilson 2007), contributes to the possibility of "intellectual breakthrough" (Axelrod 1979). As Said (2004, 25) appreciated,

[E]very reading and interpretation of a canonical work reanimates it in the present, furnishes an occasion for rereading, allows the modern and the new to be situated together in a broad historical field whose usefulness is that it shows us history as an agonistic process still being made.

The invention of the future occurs through recovery of the past. May JCT and Bergamo continue their historic roles in this compelling disciplinary undertaking. With one eye cast back at a distinguished series of predecessors¹², the new co-editors—Adam Howard and Hongyu Wang—can encourage us to face the fractious present through the past, thereby enabling us to forge a future in which a historically informed, intellectually vibrant curriculum studies field is worthy of those schoolteachers and their students that it serves.

NOTES

1. For a history of the Reconceptualization of the U.S. curriculum studies – its first paradigm shift, from a primarily procedural field (typified by Tyler’s simplistic, disastrous questions: 1949) focused on curriculum development to a scholarly field focused on understanding curriculum—see Pinar et al. 1995, 186ff.; Pinar 2008. For a history of JCT and its affiliated conference—Bergamo—see Pinar 2006 (153-162; Miller 2005). For a sampling of articles published during JCT’s first twenty years, see Pinar 1999.
2. As scholars are painfully aware, the Bush Administration was determined to replace education faculty who study the past, critique the present, and theorize the future with “scientists” who ascertain “empirically” “what works.” This replacement of theory, history, and critique with statistics accomplishes the right-wing aspiration to silence a politically vulnerable academic field that dares to dream of democracy and education. On one right-wing website, Dewey’s book of that title is listed 5th among the “ten most harmful books of the 19th and 20th centuries”! (See: <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=7591>) During the last few weeks of the 2008 presidential campaign, we have witnessed the inflation of the amiable Bill Ayers into, if not a terrorist threatening national security, certainly a threat to the reputation of Barack Obama. But the assault isn’t confined externally (as awful as that still would be); it seeps into the institutions where we work. Alas, there we encounter colleagues in other specializations within education eager to take advantage of our political vulnerability, including too many administrators who, instead of representing the academic field of education—as institutionalized in the divisions of the American Educational Research Association (recall that curriculum studies is Division B)—represent, it appears, only themselves.
3. Unable to express violence to those politically superior actors or groups (in this case the Bush Administration and its agents posing as deans, department chairs, and colleagues) from whom it originated, oppressed individuals or groups deflect their impotent rage onto each other or, especially, upon politically weaker colleagues. Rather than expressing vertical violence at their frustration’s causes, then, assaulted groups enact horizontal violence at each other and, especially, at the vulnerable. Versions of this concept have been around for a long time; one, for instance, was employed in the 1930s to understand racial violence in the U.S. (see Pinar 2001, 189ff.).
4. The election of Barack Obama does not necessarily portend an awakening from the nightmare. Despite his enormous appeal, Barack Obama affords little comfort, given the historic readiness of the Democrats to concede education to the right-wing. In his Denver speech accepting the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination, Obama called for “an army [!] of new teachers.” While he pledged to pay teachers “higher salaries and give them more support,” he also pledged to “ask for higher standards and more accountability” (accessed on August 30, 2008, from <http://www.gantdaily.com/news/68/ARTICLE/29352/2008-08-28.html>). No “change” here: even candidate Obama succumbed to the rhetoric of school deform. Will his presidency be different?
5. Russell Jacoby (2008, B5) cites economics, philosophy, and psychology as exhibiting a “ruthlessly anti- or non-historical orientation that encourages shelving past geniuses.” In U.S. curriculum studies, “past geniuses” include Bobbitt, Tyler, and Schwab. This is Jackson’s (1992) list that I affirm, but I supplement it with Huebner (1999) and Macdonald (1995) as well. In this list, Dewey is the proverbial elephant in the room. A revised curriculum studies canon includes previously excluded others, among them Jane Addams, Ida B. Wells, W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter Woodson: see Crocco, Munro, and Weiler 1999; Sadovnik and Semel 2002; Alridge 2008.
6. Part of what is “elusive” about “social justice” (and its earlier incarnation, “practice”) is the absence of those material—and specifically political—conditions enabling us (should we choose) to contribute to its realization, even in the curriculum (let alone in society generally). Without influence over school practice, we cannot “improve” it.

(Except, of course, through our courses, a “threat” right-wing ideologues evidently still fear, prompting them to attempt to legislate the curricular content of teacher education in the U.S. [Pinar 2004, 217], not to mention the school curriculum—which is why I advocate curriculum studies scholars providing excluded content [indirectly, through our courses] not contained in school textbooks [for instance, Pinar 2001].). That there are today few actual opportunities for university-based scholars or school-based educators to realize “social justice” hardly means acquiescence, of course: testimony to social injustice is central to curriculum development after the Reconceptualization (again: Pinar 2001 is but one example). Chasing after an elusive object undermines the intellectual advancement of the discipline as it diverts attention from the academic field to a social sphere which we are ill-positioned to affect. I trust it is this frustrated political ambition—and not another elusive object (financial gain)—that animates some scholars to compose introductory textbooks rather than working on difficult conceptual problems faced by the field, problems whose resolution might constitute intellectual breakthrough (Axelrod 1979).

7. Being fragmented is a problem only because the field was, in its first paradigmatic moment, unified, or so it appeared, under Tyler. The truth was that from the outset Tyler was always being revised (Taba for instance), even rejected (Schwab), a decade before Kliebard underscored its theoretical weaknesses (and Tyler scrambled to defend it, if disingenuously: Kridel and Bullough 2007, 94). Mature disciplines accept internal fragmentation (see Messer-Davidow et al. 1993) as a feature of internal complexity.

8. In a pivotal, I suggest, canonical, essay, Petra Munro (1998, 271) contests the long-standing association of curriculum history with the school: “When the story of curriculum history begins with the emergence of public schooling, it not only obscures other ways of coming to know, but it predicates education on separation from the private.” By insisting, then, on an institutional definition of curriculum inseparable from “the school,” curriculum history “excludes education in the home (parenting, domestic knowledge), education through esthetic forms (slave quilts, spiritual, folklore), and through other “informal” (although certainly not considered such by those persons involved) institutions such as women’s study clubs, settlement houses, etc. obscuring education in ‘other’ spheres outside of the public, eases women’s, African Americans’ and other marginalized groups’ forms of knowing and being as a source for theorizing curriculum.” Moreover, Munro (1998, 272) engenders the “tracing of origins” as guaranteeing erasure of women’s curricular accomplishments.

9. Here I am associating the genesis of contemporary curriculum studies with the publication of Bobbitt’s *The Curriculum* (1918), but other dates are also plausible (Pinar et al. 1995, 70, 96). Given controversies surrounding the identity of field since the 1970s, it is prudent for current students to link their research projects to curriculum studies scholarship produced during pre-paradigm-shift era (for a succinct summary, see Jackson 1992; for an ideologically-inspired revisionist curriculum history, see Ravitch 2002).

10. Perhaps most famously, Ted Aoki (2005 [1990], 267ff.) invoked jazz as a metaphor for hearing curriculum in a new key. While not using that metaphor, Hongyu Wang (2004, 5) also employs auditory (as well as spatial) metaphors to depict her exploration of what is simultaneously subjective and social, past and present, characterizing her intellectual journey as one “within,” in search of “lost voices” and “invisible traces.” During such a journey, “home” does not stay the same; indeed, it is “renewed” (Wang 2004, 5). Ending its narcissistic isolation in the present, curriculum studies scholars can reconfigure its disciplinary home by listening to “those voices” through sustained study of the field’s intellectual history.

11. With this use of this phrase Maxine Greene emphasized the future in the present, specifically in her present. Sartre’s influence is showing here, as, in contrast to Freud’s preoccupation with the past, Sartre positioned the future as primary in the determination of the present. To acknowledge Greene’s Sartrean emphasis upon the future, I subtitled a collection engaging with her work “I am not yet” (Pinar 1998). Juxtaposing Freud and Sartre in the method of *currere*, I incorporated both the past (the regressive) and the future (the progressive). For compelling autobiographical examples of the past as formative of one’s present projects: see Grande 2004, 91-92, 159-160; Howard 2008, ix-xv.)

12. Among Howard’s and Wang’s distinguished predecessors are Janet L. Miller who served as Managing Editor 1978-1998. After I stepped down as editor, William Reynolds assumed the post, followed in chronological order by JoAnne Pagano, Dennis Sumara, Brent Davis, Patrick Slattery, and Marla Morris.

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