What Is Curriculum Theorizing? What Are Its Implications for Practice?

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Structural, generic, and substantive curriculum theorizing expand understanding of what is and point to what could be.

While no one would contend that the curriculum field has an array of full-blown theories, there is abundant theorizing activity that explores aspects of the field. Presented here is a description of the major emphases in the field of curriculum theorizing as well as the focus, value positions, and implications for practice of each.

Several approaches for classifying theory orientations have been proposed, notable among them those by Macdonald (1976) and Pinar (1978). The classification used here, though less sensitive in some respects than the other two, highlights the major differences in orientation. The categories of curriculum theorizing to be examined are: structural, substantive, and generic.* It should be noted that classification is based on *theorizing* rather than on *theorizers*. When theorizers are identified, their contribution to the category being examined should be considered rather than the whole spectrum of their work.

Definitions

A presentation about curriculum theorizing assumes that all involved share common meanings for such terms as "curriculum" and "theory." Strangely enough, this assumption may be foolhardy. In this discussion, theorizing is defined as the activity preliminary to theory completion; it is mainly a deductive approach to viewing phe-

* Retrospective theorizing, a fourth category identified by the writer, is not described here.

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nomena and their potential relationships. Theorizing may in part be based on the outcomes of research, but it differs from research in that research is taken to be largely inductive, examining specific circumstances and conditions with an aim toward generalizing to broader contexts. Theory attempts to identify and describe, explain and predict; it may also prescribe or suggest desirable elements, relationships, or outcomes. Theorizing strives to enlarge vision, to present new possibilities, and to bring deeper understanding.

A definition of curriculum acceptable to more than a few is (far) beyond the scope of this endeavor. The definition a theorizer prefers is based on beliefs and orientation integral to the theorizing itself. Thus, as each theorizing emphasis is explored, inferred consensual definitions of curriculum will be presented. Criteria for selection of the theorizing work included here were based in part on defining curriculum as a field of study involved with what is taught in the schools, how it is taught, how what is taught is planned for, and how it is evaluated.

The meaning of "practice" also needs clarification. If practice is construed as only that which presently occurs in schools, then a mere fraction of curriculum theorizing can be viewed as relevant to practice because only a portion is compatible with the principles that undergird the present structure of schools. If, however, practice is conceived as the arena where the desirable can become the possible, then few if any barriers can be said to exist between theory and practice. It is in the latter sense that the word practice is used.

Structural Theorizing

Most of the theorizing in the first 50 years of the field focused on identifying elements in curriculum and their interrelationships or on the structure of decisions involved in curriculum planning. Many are currently involved in structural theorizing; most of those stressing curriculum development can trace their roots to the work of Ralph W. Tyler.

In *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1950), Tyler conceptualized what has become the most widely known approach to curriculum making. According to this approach, planning for instruction must include explication of purpose, design and organization of student activities to achieve the purpose, and evaluation of progress toward the purpose.

The longevity of this work, identified not as a theory but as a rationale or explanation of controlling principles, can be attributed in part to its broad base. According to Tyler, the sources for curriculum decisions should be the student, the society in which the education is to take place, and the accumulated knowledge of the times. Rather than alienating those who would stress one of these sources over the others, Tyler was among those who unified the emerging curriculum field by encompassing virtually all points of earlier disagreement. In an atmosphere that fostered the application of management techniques to many fields of endeavor, the management of curriculum decisions as presented in the Tyler rationale gained rapid, long-lasting, and widespread acceptance.

John I. Goodlad (1966), one of

Tyler's students at the University of Chicago, extended Tyler's work through the development of a conceptual system that envisions the basic decisions of curriculum planning as occurring at various levels of authority. Decisions farthest removed from the student include those made by such agencies as state boards of education, local boards of education, or boards of trustees. Curriculum decisions made by these groups include textbook approval and instructional time specification. Based on such decisions and guidelines, additional curriculum decisions may be made for learners by administrators and groups of teachers; curriculum guides exemplify the outcome of some of these decisions.

Stemming from the decisions made at prior levels, teachers can decide what is appropriate material for specific learners and how the material can be taught. Teacher decisions not consistent with or formulated in ignorance of decisions at earlier points fall outside the framework of consistency emphasized in this system. A further extension of Goodlad's system is proposed by McNeil (1977) who identified the personal level as the point at which the learner makes conscious choices from among all that is presented to him or her.

Elaboration of the Tyler rationale or "the rational approach to curriculum planning" may be found in many sources, including such time-honored works as *Planning Curriculum for Schools* (1974) by Saylor and Alexander, and Taba's *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice* (1962), or in more recent *Curriculum Development: Theory into Practice* (1980) by Tanner and Tanner and *Course Design* by Posner and Rudnitsky (1978).

Some theorizers are concerned with other structures of curriculum in addition to the structure of planning. One of the best known of these theorizers is George A. Beauchamp, whose book *Curriculum Theory* first appeared in 1961.

Beauchamp visualizes curriculum theory as a subset of educational theory; design theory and engineering theories in turn are subsets of curriculum theory. Beauchamp's educational structure involves a number of systems including a curriculum system, an instructional system, and an evaluation system. He defines a curriculum system as the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating a curriculum. Input into the system includes community characteristics, social and cultural values, and the personalities of the persons involved. The output is a curriculum or a written document. Input into the instructional system includes the curriculum; one of the outputs is student learning. Consequently, the evaluation or appraisal system uses such information as data from the instructional system to point to desirable improvements needed in the curriculum or instructional system.

Johnson (1968) also uses systems constructs in describing the relation between curriculum and instruction. He defines curriculum as "a structured series of intended learning outcomes." Curriculum is not a system but an output of a curriculum development system. Instruction consists of two interactions: that between the student and the environment and that between the student and the teacher. The instructional system consists of three stages: planning, instruction itself, and evaluation. The Beauchamp and Johnson models are not identical, but the degree to which they are congruent serves to identify the basic core of theorizing that focuses on the structure of curriculum elements.

What can be concluded about structural theorizing? Many involved in structural theorizing consider themselves to be engaged in scientific processes that allow them to be neutral. This type of theorizing is not neutral; however, no human activity is. Normative issues are at stake in both the questions addressed and in the answers offered. The answers are often seen more clearly than the questions, but the questions and decision points identified are deeply embedded in views of such basic constructs as learning, education, and person-ness.

A number of structural theorizers explicitly address values, beliefs, and assumptions. Their purpose is to make clear the importance of this dimension as identified by Goodlad (1966) and others. These theorizers do not seek to identify new methods for making curriculum but, by focusing on the pervasiveness of beliefs, they shed new light on long-established practices.

In general, those who focus on curriculum development and the structure of curriculum base their views on an underlying belief in human rationality. Because the person is seen as fundamentally a thinking-acting being, it follows that human affairs should be conducted in a logical manner where consistency is a major criterion of effectiveness. Terminology is crucial; precise definitions are imperative. Since curriculum planning is a major focus, curriculum is commonly defined as a plan or as intended outcomes. It may also be described as a program of study. Generally, curriculum and instruction are regarded as two distinct elements whose patterns of complementarity are an important concern. Analogue models are often developed with such other fields as engineering and systems design. Through description and definition, this theorizing aims to put boundaries on the curriculum field and on curriculum development processes to render them more manageable.

What can be learned from structural theorizing? Structural theorizing affirms that educational practice is not an art but is, in large part, a science. As such, all that occurs in the complexity of human learning, particularly as it relates to planning for that learning, should be identified, described, and at least to some extent controlled. An understanding of structural theorizing can provide insight into the components of the curriculum development processes as traditionally conceived. It can help pinpoint problems of a struggling teacher; it can aid in the orderly execution of curriculum planning; it can shed light on activities that occur prior to, during, and after instruction. An understanding of the interrelationships of these components can lead to the elimination of harmful practices that too often result in spurious evaluation, inappropriate instruction, and unfair grading. And through the interaction of those who "practice" structural theorizing and those who "practice" curriculum making, new connections can be made between traditional paradigms and phenomena as yet unrecognized.

Generic Theorizing

In sharp contrast to the concerns of the structural theorizers are the concerns of those who focus not on cur-

riculum making or on curriculum elements, but on the outcomes of curriculum. The emphasis is on the cumulative effects of schooling on the total person. Generic theorizers view curriculum as broadly conceived, as encompassing the total educational environment of the school. They argue that since much of what is taught is unrecognized (at least by those who are to "receive" the teaching) and may in fact be unintended, the revelation of assumptions, beliefs, and perceived truths underlying decisions of what to teach is of the highest priority. New and usually implicit hypotheses are generated from insights gained from such fields as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and political theory. This theorizing tends to use sources outside of education to understand better what is happening within education. New perspectives are offered with which to view long-standing practices. Generic theorizing tends to be highly critical of past and present conceptions of curriculum that have placed limitations on all aspects of education.—for example, on content, on interactions among students and between students and teachers, and on the interrelationships between school and society. Value bases are usually explicit, while definitions and propositions remain to be inferred. Generic theorizing seeks not to put boundaries on the field in order to manage it, but rather to remove as many barriers as possible in order that all persons involved in the educative process can be liberated from the entrapment of unexamined assumptions.

The terminology used in generic theorizing stands in sharp contrast to that used in structural theorizing. In place of such terms as goals, objectives, feedback, outcomes, process, input, and output are such words as person-ness, humaneness, anticipation, consciousness, expectation, justice, liberation, integration, complexity, diversity, and simplicity.

A basic thread running through generic theorizing is contempt for the reduction of the human-who-is-a-student to the learner-who-is-a-type. Huebner (1975a) writes:

Think of it—there standing before the educator is a being partially hidden in the cloud of unknowing. For centuries the poet has sung of his near infinitudes; the theologian has preached of his depravity and hinted of his participation in the divine; the philosopher has struggled to encompass him in his systems, only to have him repeatedly escape; the novelist and dramatist have captured his fleeting moments in never-to-be-forgotten esthetic forms; and the man engaged in curriculum has the temerity to reduce this being to a single term—"learner" (p. 219).

A corresponding disdain is held for those practices which place the student into the less-than-human posture. One of the main targets of criticism is the overemphasis on planning that begins with the specification of observable behaviors and often ends with the standardized testing of such behaviors. According to Apple:

"A clear message of generic theorizing is that desirability is determined by values."

. . . the problem lies behind this—in a fundamental ethic that all important modes of human actions can be known in advance by educators and social scientists; that certainty in interaction among people is of primary import; and underlying all of these, that the primary aspects of thought and sentiment of students should be brought under institutionalized control (1975b, p. 120).

A final commonality in generic theorizing to be noted here is the thrust for liberation. Benham (1981) detects similarities among those who look for liberation within the person and those who look for it without. The former often examine the inner self through the study of such philosophies as existentialism and phenomenology. A common theme of this theorizing is that learning, schooling, all life experiences are highly personal and unique for each individual. Those who stress liberation from without typically use sociological and political frameworks to question the dynamics of power, control, and influence—for example, who has the power in curriculum making, what controls which knowledge becomes school knowledge, what influences determine success in school and in later life?

Although much can be written about the core of generic theorizing, in the uniqueness of each theorizer's contributions lies the essence. Contrasting perspectives offered by Dwayne Huebner, Michael W. Apple, and James B. Macdonald are of interest.

One of Huebner's prevalent and persistent themes is language as a reflection of thought. Whether or not thought is bounded by language, communication of thought is inextricably related to it. Huebner suggests six language systems representing structures of meaning appropriate for curriculum thinking and communicating: descriptive, explanatory, controlling, legitimizing, prescriptive, and affiliative (1975b). Each is related to and can be used to express both the obvious and the subtle of five value frameworks: technical, political, scientific, esthetic, and ethical (1975a). He urges the exploration of frameworks other than the technical which he feels is greatly overemphasized by current curriculum practices. Huebner's writing conveys messages on many levels and exemplifies the power of language.

Apple's analysis of the political ramifications of both the overt and the hidden curriculum throws another light on past and present practice. Drawing on the concept of basic rules and preference rules, Apple illustrates that students typically are unaware that there are alternatives to the patterns of living perpetuated in schools. School patterns, determined by preference rules, are based on assumptions that are tacit and "by the very fact that they are tacit, their potency is enlarged" (1975a, p. 99). These patterns help to create concepts of work that alienate people from that part of their living in which they engage in production and therefore result in a false dichotomy between work and play. Apple and King (1977) found that this alienation begins for many in kindergarten. Even young children come to regard school experiences as work and thus are placed in an adversarial relationship with school activities and school personnel. Much of Apple's attention is devoted to persons who "don't make it" by the prevailing rules. In all of his work, Apple's respect for each individual's integrity and inherent basic rights is a major theme.

Macdonald's current theorizing is

based squarely on his long-standing commitment to human liberation. He affirms that he is interested in curriculum, not for the sake of shaping and controlling behavior, but for the sake of human liberation (1981). Although one never completely attains liberation but instead is in process of becoming ever more liberated, "liberating persons" can become fully aware of their virtually limitless human potential. Macdonald is optimistic that our full potential can now be recognized. He writes,

The doors of human conception opened and ushered in the technological revolution. . . . Now we are facing the opening of doors of perception in human experience. . . . The human race is beginning to take another major step into the unknown source of its imagination. . . . it is as if we are coming to know that what we have imagined and conceptualized resides within us as potential, rather than having to be made into conceptual and material form (1974, pp. 92-93).

Macdonald has proposed a transcendental ideology of education that would have as its aim the centering of the person, an emphasis on "the completion of the person or the creation of meaning that utilizes all the potential given to each person" (1974, p. 105). Macdonald paints the possibilities of a transcendental curriculum in broad strokes, but the possibilities reveal themselves to those open to the concept of curriculum as possibility. This recent perspective offered by Macdonald is personal and intimate. His increasing attention in the last several years to the moral and personal in curriculum offers an almost private glimpse into a person's innermost thoughts.

What does generic theorizing offer to practice? In all of its shadings, generic theorizing presents perspectives that allow a conscious look at practices too often accepted unconsciously, without question or awareness of the assumptions on which the practice is based. It should not be inferred from such theorizing that all educational activity is harmful or results in patterns of living deleterious to the persons involved. Some curricula, some instruction, some environments facilitate the achievement of the basic generic theorizing goals: self-knowledge, realization of human abilities encompassing the full range of possibilities, liberation. But to the generic theorizer what is unexamined is unrealized. Practices that are desirable can be enlarged and expanded

through an awakened sense of their potential; undesirable practices can correspondingly be eliminated or modified.

A clear message of generic theorizing is that desirability is determined by values; whether or not one agrees with a given judgment of desirability, one can attempt to gain the perspective offered by a generic theorizer in making his or her own judgment. But just as desirability is a function of values, so are the questions one asks and the phenomena one chooses to examine. Generic theorizing can stimulate persons to search out the bases for their questions and patterns of

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living and, indeed, for their educational practices.

Substantive Theorizing

Theory activity that highlights desirable subject matter or content can be described as substantive curriculum theorizing. Those engaged in substantive theorizing generally do not address structural issues nor are they concerned with the ills of schooling in general. Emphasis is not on the negative aspects of what occurs under the auspices of curriculum, but rather is on areas of omission in the curriculum. Curriculum is often defined as program or as intended outcomes. In any case, the emphasis is on that which would be more desirable than what is typically found in the school curriculum. What is desirable to one theorizer may not be desirable to another; what is desirable is determined by one's values and assumptions. The assumptions and values on which substantive theorizing is based are an explicit and integral part of the theorizing.

Substantive theorists urge new directions for curriculum because of three perceived failures in present curricula: (1) failure of relevance, (2)

failure to foster excellence, and (3) failure to educate the total person.

An example of a call for relevance is the work of Florence Stratemeyer, *Developing a Curriculum for Modern Living* (1957). Stratemeyer proposed a curriculum that would facilitate "maximum meaning for learners" by focusing on the "problems and interests of everyday living." She identified numerous persistent life situations that she felt would facilitate the ability of students to live in and contribute to society. More recent examples may be found among those who theorize about the need for career education and vocational preparation. Those who argue for relevance, not on the basis of future need but on the basis of current needs of students, often advocate a student-centered approach emphasizing student choice of curriculum content.

A point of view addressing the failure of schools to foster excellence is presented by Philip Phenix in *Realms of Meaning* (1964). Phenix urges the pursuit of excellence through academic rigor; he attests that his suggestions have something to offer to anyone "who seeks perspective on knowledge in the modern world and who is in search of order and meaning in his own life" (p. xi). The realms or structures of meaning proposed by Phenix include symbolics, empirics, esthetics, and ethics. Phenix bases his work on the assumptions that humans can be characterized by their capacity and need to find meaning and that there are realms of meaning that are naturally human.

Elliot Eisner (1979), Gerald Weinstein and Mario Fantini (1970), and Louise Berman (1968) are among those who decry what they perceive as a disproportionate emphasis in the schools on a narrow conception of the intellect. They urge that schools consider and "teach" all those qualities and dimensions that constitute person-ness. In *New Priorities in the Curriculum* (1968), Berman proposes a curriculum based on processes that subsume what she sees as desirable in the present structure of the school curriculum and yet extend far beyond. She believes that persons are process-oriented beings, meaning in part that "a person has within his personality elements of dynamism, motion, and responsibility which enable him to live as an adequate and a contributing member of

the world of which he is a part" (p. 9). She believes that integrity is an innate quality of humans; freedom is one of the basic needs. Among the processes she recommends as bases for curriculum are decision making, perceiving, valuing, and patterning. Although a later work by Berman and Roderick (1977) collapses the categories to four, the concept of broadening the view of persons and consequently the scope of the curriculum is maintained.

What is the message of substantive theorizing? Substantive theorizing offers alternatives to present patterns of content, subjects, and programs. It forces recognition that justification based on tradition alone is unacceptable as we prepare for the 21st century. It provokes questions and provides a variety of answers. Exemplary questions are: Why have we always taught X? What would happen if we taught Y instead? How do we know that what we're teaching will help us reach our goals? Why are most schools limited in what they offer? What is the role of the school in teaching the whole person? What is the whole person? How can students be helped to excel to the best of their abilities? What should today's student learn to be prepared for life in tomorrow's world?

There is no unity of concern in the curriculum field that allows for an easy synthesis. Each strand of theorizing addresses different issues: clarification of activities and actions in curriculum making and the identification of elements and interrelationships in curriculum, instruction, and evaluation; exploration of alternative content emphases; examination of the bases of present structures and the proposal of new directions and structures.

Theorizing is an expansive activity; a major contribution of all curriculum theorizing is that it can expand one's understanding of what is and point to what could be. ∎

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