Personal Theory of Curriculum

Ingrida Barker

Paper submitted for

CI 702 Curriculum Theory

at Marshall University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

Beth Campbell, Ph. D, Professor

Graduate School of Education and Professional Development

South Charleston, West Virginia

2013

Keywords:

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**Table of Contents**

Introduction 3

My Personal Curriculum Theory 5

Literature Review 10

Individual 10

Society 12

Schools 14

Teaching and Learning 17

References 22

# Introduction

Curriculum theory is a field that can be viewed as very scholarly, abiding by certain rules and practices or very personal in terms understanding of schooling and education. McCutcheon (1982) defines curriculum as “an integrated cluster of sets of analyses, interpretations, and understandings of curricular phenomena.” Pinar et al. (2008), on the other hand, note that they see the contemporary curriculum field as seriously balkanized, “divided into relatively separate fiefdoms or sectors of scholarship, each usually ignoring the other except for occasional criticism.” The complexity of curriculum theory incorporates a variety of understandings and interpretations, integrated or ignoring each other. On a personal note, I can add that the balkanization described by Pinar et al. is also exacerbated by the friction between theorists and practitioners. The classroom and the university research have moved from the theorists, such as Tyler or Dewey, working closely with the classroom teachers to apply the theory to action; to the reconstructivist era when research distanced itself from its discourse with classroom application. Theory and its practical application add to the complexity of the concept as it’s evaluated through a multitude of personal beliefs, background values, and societal mandates for public education, changing from the blank canvas of theory to a colorful portrait of human individuality.

However, this colorful portrait, the teaching practice, unlike the fields of architecture, law, or medicine, is conducted without an audience of peers and is devoid of history of practice. Practitioners know a big deal of knowledge base that they have never really tried to articulate. Thus, the work of research community with practitioners is so important in developing codified representations of practical pedagogical wisdom of expert teachers as one of the major goals for research. This practice could definitely contribute to the scholar and expert teacher ability to define, describe, and reproduce good teaching (Shulman, 1987, p. 12), leaving the field of generalities that seem to guide the policy driven mandates for teacher evaluation and guidelines for effectiveness in the classroom.

Thus, what is the purpose of curriculum theory? Is it to guide our personal beliefs by proposing certain schemas of how we can educate every child? Or is it to serve as a distant set of rules and guidelines that rarely translate into the classroom practices? The answers to these questions are complex and inevitably comprise one’s own curriculum theory. In this paper, I will reflect on my own curriculum theory in the light of the theoretical work performed by various experts in the field throughout different epochs in the history of educational system.

# My Personal Curriculum Theory

Curriculum theory viewed from a historical perspective is a fascinating subject. Public schooling and curriculum development go hand in hand, connecting the contemporary field of curriculum and the theories that have historically shaped the world of education today. Herbert Spencer’s question “What knowledge is of most worth?” remains as important today as it was at its inception. This question has served as a guiding point as well as a point of controversy between curricular theorists of all ages. The views espoused by Hall, Dewey, Caswell, Bobbitt, or Tyler have battled over the role of education in child’s life as well as in shaping American society. Is the knowledge of classical subjects and purely academic matter more important than social preparation for life? Is child-centered approach more effective than molding the child into the existing subject-matter curriculum? The views of progressives, social reconstructionists, and essentialists advocates have taken prominent stages in curriculum development history, and these views are all evident in the contemporary field as well. However, with the growth of complexity in today’s society, curriculum theory field does not remain bound by the questions outlined previously. Curriculum as a gender, racial, aesthetic, and especially institutional text, adds to the vibrancy, complexity, and controversy in the further development of the field and elaboration of its relationship to the practice.

My concept of curriculum borrows from a variety of understandings of how learning and teaching, individual and society, and schools intertwine in their relationship with each other in order to answer the questions posed earlier in the paper. The literature review following this section addresses these views through the lens of the works of various curriculum theorists who contributed greatly to the curriculum theory field throughout the years. My curriculum theory rests on the belief that knowledge is power. Possession of knowledge empowers individuals to embark on the journey of social mobility, which is made increasingly challenging by the diversity of complex skills needed to be successful in the changed economy affected by exponential advances in technology. So, what comprises this elusive concept of knowledge? I believe that the body of knowledge has its permanent components as well as the changing ones. I side in some part with essentialists in my belief that the students should be exposed to the wealth of knowledge about the world and its history to help them ground their views of the world within the democratic principles espoused by this country. Dewey (1964, p. 425) sees the reciprocal relationship in theoretical subjects needing to become more practical as they relate to the scope of life while practical subjects become more charged with “theory and intelligent insight.” Louise Berman (1967) echoes this belief by noting that learning opportunities should provide “essence of experience,” thus the focus should shift to social, intellectual, and ethical values rather than only concentrate on the content of academic subjects.

With an advent and exponential growth of technology and globalization, however, the concept of knowledge itself has gone from the focus on an individual’s possession of a vast array of facts to the emphasis on one’s ability to manipulate, locate, and critically evaluate knowledge, available nowadays at the touch of the keyboard keys. This individual ability comprises the changing component of knowledge, as it emphasizes skill over the simple possession of facts.

Unlike essentialists, however, I do not believe in assessing student learning through standardized tests and using textbook as the sole source of curriculum. I respect the individuality of students and teachers in their mutual work in education, which reflects Dewey’s progressive views. Phenomenological views on curriculum support these views in noting that evaluating learning via statistical methods cannot be the only method; and such “messy” disciplines as phenomenology add to the complexity and richness of the institution of learning. However, the dominance of curriculum as an institutional text catches schools in the net of contradiction between goals associated with social efficiency and broader educational goals, between striving to prepare citizens for democratic life and for technical roles in our complex society (McNeil, 1986). Grumet echoes my beliefs in evaluating the difference between empiricism (standardized testing) and phenomenology. Grumet (1976), in talking about empiricism, states that “it concentrates solely on behaviors that are quantifiable, and in so doing, upon passive, manipulable “subjects” who have surrendered their capacities to direct their own conduct, report their own experience.” (Grumet, 1976, as cited in Pinar, p. 412) Bode (1927) also insists that sole reliance on scientific method in evaluating student learning leads to the trivialization of the curriculum. Bode states that if education is ever to contribute to the advancement of democracy, it needs to get away from the delusion of obtaining objectives by “sociological determination” (Bode, 1927, pp. 138-139 as cited in Pinar, p. 117). Thus, it is refreshing to see the assessment practices shifting from rigid multiple choice structures to the evaluation of the student performance through a variety of methods, relying not only on technology but also on teacher observations of student performance and the creation of student portfolios to provide evidence of learning.

Society drives the purpose of schools while schools, inadvertently, shape the future of the society. This complex relationship is exacerbated by the goal of the public educational system to educate every child and afford post-graduation opportunities to as many students as possible. Thus, the issue of equity and equality in education, promulgated by curriculum as a gender, racial, and institutional text translates into curriculum theory that attributes certain roles to individuals and the system. Just as Pagano (1990) states in her research, knowledge is power, and education is intensely political and personal. Education serves as a means of empowerment for individuals, both students and teachers. Teaching and learning are a part of political process in curriculum theory, and one has to be vigilant about its tremendous power to positively or negatively affect the lives of students. As teachers project their beliefs on various spheres of life through their instruction, so the students are affected by the educational practices based on their socioeconomic, racial, or gender background. Therefore, the practice of reflection, acute awareness of political, gender, and institutional nature of curriculum need to be incorporated by teachers in their daily practices to enable their students to become critical citizens in a democratic society.

 I believe that every student can learn, and that I as a teacher can affect that learning in a positive way. If the schools provide the students with a means of empowerment, they embark on the challenge to provide individualized approach to a diverse group of students, focusing instruction on the three R’s of the current-day curriculum: rigor, relevance, and relationships. It is not enough to be able to read, write, and do simple math. An individual has to possess the skills of manipulating the information gained from reading, writing, or doing math, which adds to the complexity of the instruction in the classroom and brings the three R’s mentioned above to the new level of meaningfulness.

When evaluating my curriculum theory, I cannot solely concentrate on student learning. If the schools are to fulfill the goals of society in producing enlightened citizenry and an effective workforce, the continuous learning aspect needs to apply to the teachers as well. In today’s society, teaching gains an increasingly tremendous importance as the standards for student learning become more complex and the demands of the society for greater citizen knowledge and skills for success and survival are growing. Also, growing evidence suggests that the teachers’ abilities are especially important contributors to student learning. To add to the complexity of the picture, demands for teachers are growing increasingly complex. In addition to classroom management, the teachers are required to enable more diverse groups of students to learn increasingly complex material. This expectation is different from previous years when teachers were expected to prepare selected few for an intense intellectual work. Teachers make instructional decisions every minute, based on their awareness of the many ways in which student learning can unfold in the context of “development, learning differences, language and cultural influences, and individual temperaments, interests, and approaches to learning” (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 2). As Darling-Hammond states, in the myriad of the decisions made by teachers, the most important one is to always do what’s best for an individual child. As simple as it sounds, this particular decision is the most complex point in teaching.

I believe that teacher knowledge base is “a codified or codifiable aggregation of knowledge, skill, understanding, and technology, of ethics and disposition, of collective responsibility” (Shulman, 1987, p. 3). In his works, Shulman explores the character of the teaching knowledge base and enumerates the following sources for this base: (1) scholarship in content disciplines; (2) the materials and settings of the institutionalized process; (3) research on schooling, learning, teaching and development; and (4) the wisdom of practice itself. Wisdom of practice is the most elusive concept and the least codified one as well. However, this source is the most important concept to me in assuring the efficacy of teaching in the efforts of reaching the needs of every child.

Teaching is also a moral endeavor. Michael Fullan explores teaching as a moral profession closely, calling for the teachers combine their sense of moral purpose with a desire for social change. According to Fullan, moral purpose (or making a difference) concentrates on bringing about the improvements. Moral purpose keeps educators close to the needs of their students while change agency provides them with the tools to accomplish their moral goals. Change, of course, is a volatile concept, and Fullan is cognizant of this issue. He, however, outlines four core capacities for building individual change capacity: vision-building, inquiry, mastery, and collaboration. These capacities can be easily translated into the institutional capacity for change that includes shared vision building, organizational structures, norms, collaborative work cultures, and practices of inquiry (Fullan, 1993, p. 2).

My personal curriculum theory reflects a variety of views, as complex as the world around me. The role of schools has not changed throughout the years of their history. It still lies in providing students with a means to succeed in the society. However, the society does not remain stagnant and advances at unprecedented rates, making schools play a constant catch-up game with the future demands for productive workforce and sustainable economy. The diverse student and teacher population exacerbates the issues of how to provide the most effective learning environments to meet the needs of all students. I do not believe in the industrial model of education and promote individualized approach with a problem-learning focus, as the latter will help the schools move to helping the society build a successful future instead of lagging behind its advances. Within this topic, it is important to mention the importance of the concept of curriculum as aesthetic text, as this strand of curriculum theory is flourishing in the current reality where fine arts degrees have more weight than MBAs (Pink’s “The Whole New Mind”, Robinson’s “Out of Our Minds”, for example). Does the current reality in schools reflect that concept of curriculum yet? I am not sure. However, going back to the curriculum as aesthetic text, it is worth noting Broudy’s research that notes the precedence of imagination (the image) over the word (concepts). Broudy suggests that the ability to generate, analyze, and synthesize concepts depends on the development of imagination (Pinar, 2008, p. 569). Within the current societal dependence on visual presentation of information, education in arts can help our students in their analytical discrimination skills in terms of their analysis of images as well as in cultivating their sensitivity to the “emotional veracity or manipulation” of the visual information (Pinar, 2008, p. 570).

# Literature Review

## Individual

The study of curriculum theory starts with the question about how individuals learn and guides many theorists in developing their curricular orientations. My curriculum theory views promote individualization and differentiation to meet diverse student needs and square the most with the progressive movement. Progressive ideas recognize individual student differences in their abilities and interests; justify the acceptance of curriculum by its relevance to students, emphasize active learning over passive one, and include vocational or other nonacademic studies (Ravitch, 1983). Thus, progressive conceptualizations of curriculum theory are identified “with the child-centered school; with social efficiency and social utility rather than social reform; and with a vigorous suspicion of “bookish” learning” (Ravitch, 1983). Dewey, one of the major progressive figures, stresses the importance of learning through experiences and activities that are carefully selected as starting points to take that learning to “higher levels of cultural, social, and intellectual meaning” (Ravitch, 1983). Dewey (1916) argues that school, an enlightened citizenry, and social change are interrelated. He advocates for the study of the subjects that deal directly with problems of health, citizenship, and the means of communication at school. In his approach, however, Dewey does not underestimate the need for thoughtful guidance of student-centered activities by the teachers, the view that was misinterpreted by various progressives in their laissez-faire attitude towards schooling and diminished role of an educator in child’s schooling. I agree with Dewey’s views, as they echo my beliefs that schools act as agents of social change by producing the enlightened citizenry. Students cannot spend their days on rote memorization without clear application of relevant and rigorous subject matter to the real world problems. The role of schools lies in producing citizens who are literate and critical consumers of information and enact social change by being personally invested in promoting the well-being of the country.

Teaching, learning, and society significantly affect each other, with more weight attached to one part of this equation by different curriculum theorists. Dewey’s views on student independence in exploration do not negate the importance of instructional guidance. Lyotard’s postmodern views (1979) view the nature of knowledge, and, subsequently, individual learning, as unable to remain stagnant as they fit into the new channels and become operational under the new tenets of societal advances. Knowledge is not an end in itself anymore. It has become a major stake in the worldwide competition of power. Lyotard also notes that on an international scale, the impact of scientific knowledge will distinguish between developed and developing countries, as it opens the new possibilities for industrial and commercial strategies on the one hand, and the political and military power on the other. Lyotard’s views are still relevant today, as the political and economic competition on the global scale remain the major points for discussion when the role of schools is debated by various stakeholders. The advent of Common Core standards is another attempt of the business world and the state leaders to bring the students not only to be competitive on the global scale but also to contribute to the economic well-being of the United States.

Lyotard (1979) states that knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: Who decides what knowledge is? Who knows what needs to be decided? In his view, the question is more than ever the question decided by the government. With the question about knowledge comes a question about language and the games that society plays with the language, as the communication component is becoming more prominent, “both as a reality and as an issue”, assuming new importance in today’s world. In elaborating on Lyotard’s questions, I view the decision making power of deciding what knowledge is as promoted by the government. In the current economic environment of the United States, the government’s concern for the citizen contributions to the struggling economy is evident. With trillions of dollars of national debt, untaxed liability concerns, and the growing business concerns about the qualified work force, it is not surprising that the business and state leaders are unanimous in their attempts to elevate the rigor of the American curriculum.

## Society

The concepts of empowerment of an individual and social mobility facilitated by education are discussed by various theorists within the framework of their corresponding fields. Within feminist framework in curriculum theory, Pagano’s work is worth noting. “Knowledge is power. Those who have it are more powerful than those who don’t. Those who define knowledge that counts are the most powerful” (Pagano, 1990, p. xvi). This view of the relationship between genders, races, and societal norms reduces everything to the concept of power and who is in control of it. Power in its most obvious term, however, is not the object of discussion here. Personal, social, and emotional empowerment provided by knowledge is a basis for success and social mobility around the world. The United States, the country built on an opportunity for upward social mobility based on hard work and perseverance, is focusing on education as a major determinant of a person’s career readiness and further success. It is not enough to be able to work hard; one has to possess specialized skills and knowledge in order to lead a life of financial stability. Thus, with the current business demands for specialized workforce, schools face an increasingly challenging task before them to envision the future and prepare students for its demands.

My views are also supported by the views of the Progressives who explore the interrelation between schools and society in a different but also meaningful way. Progressive views establish that society needs to take a more personal stand when it comes to education of its children and facilitate active learning by student engagement through various activities that they would have otherwise learned at home. The societal involvement is a necessary part, as the systemic approach to education will help avoid the views on changes in school and curriculum as “arbitrary inventions of particular teachers, at the worst transitory fads, and at the best merely improvements in certain details” (Dewey, 1900). Dewey advocates the role of schools in promoting the best interests of the society while concentrating on active learning experiences of a child. He views the changes in schooling as a product of current social environment as well as the efforts in meeting the needs of the future society, not as a mere transfer of knowledge of standalone disciplines and ideals of Western civilization, advocated by faculty psychology. Dewey contends that current schools are created for “listening”, passive absorption of information. In his book, he argues that the children need to be active learners, and the classrooms need to be restructured to accommodate their learning. I support Dewey’s stand in this regard. Learning is an active pursuit of knowledge, and in our ever changing society, schools still accommodate students to their structure of sitting in single rows rather than accommodating their environments to meet diverse student needs.

Dewey (1900) states that the school serves as a reflection of the life of the larger society, permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science. It cannot serve the only needs of 1 percent who go on to get higher education, but needs to accommodate the rest of the student population who should possess enough skill to productively contribute to the society after graduation. Thus, he promotes not only the interrelatedness of the subjects but also student learning of disciplines through hands-on applications of the concepts. With technology and globalization affecting the character of education today, Dewey’s principles stand as relevant as ever. The rigor and relevance of curriculum cannot be achieved without exposing students to the interrelatedness of the content areas and pushing them to be active and critical learners.

Of course, the role of the society as a willing, positive participant in the education of its citizens is not broadly accepted by everybody. Carson, for example, (1992) discusses the contradictory nature of empowering individuals to reflect about social reality and identify construction within the society that discourages individuals asking questions about purpose, identity construction, and contributions to culture. Carlson also talks about the top-down, one-size-fits-all bureaucratic approach to the school system management led to an era of emphasis on basic skills that alienated students and demoralized teachers. Teachers need to be empowered and supported to knowledgeably guide students on their path of learning. Thus, the power to empower starts with an individual and ultimately ends with an individual.

## Schools

Various views are expressed about the role of the schools in today’s society. Bateman (1974) argues that “schooling is not neutral politically; it takes place in an institution designed and operated by those in power, to serve those who will come into power, to teach each child to accept his pre-assigned place” (p. 60). Bode (1927), on the other hand, contends that the aim of education is to humanize the social order to make sure that the pursuit of self-interest would not undermine the social progress of others. I believe that schools should strike that balance between meeting the individual needs for self-actualization and contributing to the societal needs for progress. Political interests should not be a part of school management. As John McNeil (1978) notes in emphasizing the role of curriculum specialists as curriculum inquirers not the bearers of special interests or national policy, apolitical nature of curriculum process would lead to a balanced approach between meeting individual and societal needs. Curriculum specialists and educational practitioners are in the position of empowering students and peers, becoming transformational intellectuals rather than “skillful technicians” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

However, the nature of American schooling demonstrates expectancy for social opportunity for all people also makes it a very political process in nature, ruled by the curriculum policy. The simplest model of the curriculum policy making, according to Elmore and Sykes (1992), is rooted in a top-down approach where curriculum flows from one authoritative source through the medium of the school systems, influencing teaching practice and its effects on students. This approach also triggers emphasis on centralization of curriculum, which, according to McNeil (1987), could result in student alienation, initiated by little attention to student differences and their assignment of roles as passive learners. As I have stated previously, my views on assessment differ greatly from the ones of those advocating centralization of curriculum and testing. Learning is a complex process that cannot be captured in a multiple choice test and should certainly not be viewed as a tangible product that can be easily evaluated by a hit-and-run assessment system.

Whatever function schools are perceived to perform, they are not functioning in isolation. Goodland contends that schools mirror the surrounding society (Goodlad, 1984). Curriculum cannot be grasped unless it is viewed in context, and Cornbleth (1985) argues that isolation of curriculum from multiple, complex contexts is an absurdity. Giroux (2005) states that the borders of our diverse racial, ethnic, or cultural identities as well as our experiences and communities we live in connect us more than they separate us, mutating and developing in this ever changing context of globalization. Theorizing these relations in terms of their tension, domination, or emancipatory possibilities is a tremendous task, and pedagogy plays a central role in not only deconstructing texts but also in situating politics within a broader sets of human relations that create modes of an individual and social agency to enable democratic values, practices, and forms of sociality. Thus, pedagogy is not only a resource for developing competency and critical understanding but also an opportunity for promoting possibility for interpretation as a challenge to the coming police state and shaping of a more democratic social order. In this view, the role of schools becomes vast and complex, while maintaining its role of producing democratic society citizens.

 Thus, I share Pagano’s views that “education is intensely personal and intensely political” (Pagano, 1990, p. xiv). Pagano compares education to a conversation about finding one’s place in the world. Some come in already knowing the rules of the conversation. Some learn the subtle intricacies of the discourse, and some hesitate too long and never get a word in. This conversation puts everybody in their place. This view is both pessimistic and hopeful, as we as teachers can make a difference in how our students learn to hold this conversation called life. Pagano notes that we as teachers have learned to live in the world where knowledge claims are judged according to standards of truthfulness not of the truth. Our choices what to teach, how to teach, and how to interpret the texts we teach are ethical in nature. These are the choices about the world we want to live in and what life we want to support. Thus, unconsciously, we promulgate these beliefs into our own classrooms while attempting to use our classrooms as social laboratories in the schools that are not out to change the society but to produce “enlightened citizens who will act intelligently” (Herbert, 1960, p. 83).

Pagano (1990) views teaching as a purely political process, noting that every teacher of the poor and disenfranchised knows that teaching is through and through political. We as teachers want to change the students believing that the change is for the better. However, in our quest for the inculcation of our beliefs, we unconsciously project the patriarchal society’s views consistent with the standards of the dominant culture. Education is both intensely personal and intensely political.

## Teaching and Learning

Various theorists espouse different views on teaching and learning. Some focus on self-actualization as a form of humanistic development. Foshay, for example, advocates for humane curriculum that is tentative, interactive, and takes into account the individualization of instruction that is cooperative or rigorous. (1970, p. 150) Phenix (1964), on the other hand, believes that education must be grounded in search for meaning, with curriculum organized in multidisciplinary ways, exploring the depth of individual subjects but also allowing for correlation and integration between these subjects. I support Phenix’s view of education, as, in its reciprocal relationship with a society, education needs to advocate curriculum that fosters inquiry, multidisciplinary approach to subjects, and active learning.

However, the views on teaching and learning become more controversial when gender and race are thrown into the curricular equation. Sleeter (1996) denotes that race is not the only axis of oppression in the United States. Social class and gender are equally powerful in terms of oppression and affect the teacher views on the individual achievement in this country. According to Sleeter, 90% of teachers in the U.S. are Whites, so they have never experienced either racism or the minority communities like people of color have. Whites believe that haves and have-nots move up in this world by the value of their own merit or effort. They often look back at their European American ancestors who came to this country extremely poor but were able to socially move up because of their hard work and dedication. This view is channeled towards the minority groups as well, as Whites believe that with continuous effort and hard work, these groups can achieve the same success as the European-American ancestors of the Whites. However, society operates differently for different groups, and different groups construct opposing explanations for inequality. Thus, unconscious societal perceptions about race and minority result in a different path or the obstruction for upward mobility for minorities. Within the framework of curriculum as a racial and gender text, the issues of equity and equality continuously interact within the framework of curriculum as an institutional and phenomenological text. Race and ethnicity should not be barriers to upward social mobility, and even though schools should operate on the premise of empowering every student, there are still a lot of young people in this country who have not been provided with this opportunity.

Most people in the States evaluate the level of achievement by individual ability and effort. I have to confess that I am one of them. However, Sleeter (1996) notes that there are two more levels that the students need to be aware of: institutional and cultural. At the institutional level, one ought to examine the written and unwritten rules that are used to regulate human behavior. It is vital for the teachers to examine their views on acceptable classroom behavior, for example, and understand that there are multiple views and multiple perspectives on what is considered acceptable in different cultures and racial groups. At the cultural level, the examination of cultural beliefs that people hold about diversity and society, how and by whom these beliefs are encoded, and how and by whom they are transmitted, is needed. The author states that the relationships between the individuals and institutional levels as well as the ones between institutions and cultural beliefs are reciprocal, and the awareness of these levels as well as unwritten rules needs to be developed in the pre-service students who aspire to become teachers. Sleeter’s work has definitely made me review my position on the importance of hidden curriculum and the relationship of culture, individual, and institution within the framework of curriculum theory.

I believe that the connection between the individual and institution inextricably lies in the students’ learning experiences. Kilpatrick’s thoughts (1918) on project based learning are worth noting in this respect. Kilpatrick states that bonds created by interactions with the world constitute child’s learning, and the acquisition of these bonds adheres to certain laws. A child learns certain individual attitudes in regards to the social situations and exercises those in a certain manner. The teacher should plan child’s experiences in order to help exercise readiness in dealing with certain situations (for example, when one is angry, it is difficult to express the feelings of joy, even though in a social situation, the latter is more desirable than the open expression of anger). Through projects and teacher guidance (even though Kilpatrick prefers the child’s involvement in the four steps of a project: purposing, planning, executing, and judging), the child builds bonds that contribute to the ethical quality of conduct and learns how to appropriately respond to situations. Learning consists of acquiring and changing bonds as the child progresses through school curriculum.

Project as a purposeful activity helps students, working under the guidance of well-prepared teachers; build the ideals necessary for social functioning. These carefully structured social experiences utilize the child’s native capacities that are “now too frequently wasted” (Kilpatrick, 1918). Kilpatrick states, “The regime of purposeful activity offers then a wider variety of educative moral experiences more nearly typical of life itself than does our usual school procedure, lends itself better to the educative evaluation of these, and provides better for the fixing of all as permanent acquisitions in the intelligent moral character” (pg. 334).

Purposeful activity cannot be achieved without purposeful instructional guidance. The purposeful instructional guidance is evident in Dewey’s works that advocate for carefully planned pedagogical guidance of the child’s educational experiences, as they would facilitate the students’ ability to plan and affect social change and place child as an active learner of meaningful, interrelated content of school curriculum.

Herbart’s philosophy is more rigid than Dewey’s or Kilpatrick’s. His views about teaching and curriculum stem from the believe that learning is a set of experiences coordinated by a skillful educator. Herbart believed that students develop interest in subject matter if their already acquired ideas are perceptive to the new ones, as the philosopher propagated the necessity of “rendering the mind ready to receive instruction” (Compayre, 2002). He asserted that the student abilities could be instilled, and thorough education could provide framework for their development, with past associations encouraging the acquisition of the new ones. Herbart proposed views on pedagogy that were contradicting the old faculty psychology of the time which expected students to enter the classrooms ready to learn anything with all their memory and mental capacities at their disposal. His views, however, did not put student learning as an active component of instructional process, as compared to the one of Dewey or Kilpatrick.

Tyler , on the other hand, focused on learning rather than teaching. In this light, his approach to curriculum and teaching is vividly represented by his statement, “It is what he does that he learns, not what the teacher does” (Tyler, 1949). Therefore, student learning, a more elusive and more complex to observe, surfaces as a focal point for curriculum and teaching within Tyler Rationale framework, as opposed to Herbart’s emphasis on skillful teaching to prepare students for their learning experiences. Tyler’s contributions to formalizing the curriculum are significant in terms of rendering curriculum in terms of objectives and their evaluation to assess the impact of the curriculum on student learning. Tyler noted that the objectives need to be based on the knowledge of educational philosophy and the value judgments of those in charge of schooling. Scientific study of the curriculum also construes one of the bases for selecting objectives wisely. The educational objectives, thus, depend on philosophical underpinnings of those in charge of curriculum, and Tyler believed that even though “no single source of information is adequate to provide basis for wide and comprehensive decisions about the objectives of the school”, each source should be considered when planning educational objectives for children (Tyler, 1949). Even though Tyler’s views have been scrutinized or rendered archaic by many contemporary theorists, they still resonate with me as a sound basis for instructional decision making based on specific objectives and the assessment system based on what is actually taught , not some ephemeral judgments based on an individual hobby teaching.

Curriculum theory, just like phenomenology and a life surrounding it, is a messy concept. Curriculum and pedagogy are inextricably linked, rendered through the human lens of diverse backgrounds, race, ethnicity, political decisions, and multitude of other factors. However, the simplicity of curriculum theory for me lies in determining what is best for an individual child and doing everything in my power to help that child succeed. That’s the motto of my daily work in education and the underlying belief supporting my personal curriculum theory.

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