

A Research Agenda

THEORY, PRACTICE, AND THE DOUBLE-EDGED PROBLEM OF IDIOSYNCRACY

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The task here is to explore the relationship between curriculum theory and classroom practice. More specifically, the task is to explain why a theory-practice gap exists, why scholars continue to lament that practitioners do not use theory and research, and practitioners continue to complain that most curriculum theory and research are unusable,¹ why those who look "behind the classroom door" discover that even when a curriculum theory has been adopted and translated into official policy it normally is not implemented by classroom teachers,² and why even when teachers sincerely espouse a particular curriculum theory, the gap between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use often remains wide.³

Accounting for the theory-practice gap is not easy for at least two significant reasons. First, many variables contribute to creating the gap. In attempting to explain the gap, for instance, we might focus on the problem of language incompatibility. Theoreticians speak the language of abstract analysis, but practitioners tend to talk and think with anecdotes and particular cases. Or we might focus on theoreticians' professional socialization as skeptics and critics; in contrast, practitioners must call on the power of positive thinking to flourish in a difficult, uncertain world.

Students of the innovation process suggest other variables that figure into the equation. They emphasize the need for practitioners to own an idea, of the need for ideas and programs to emerge, at least in part, at the grass-roots level rather than in universities so that practitioners will have the motivation, the personal commitment, to follow through with the arduous task of implementation.

¹Marvin C. Alkin, Richard Daillak, and Peter White, *Using Evaluations: Does Evaluation Make a Difference?* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979), Marcia Guttentag, *Evaluation of Social Intervention Programs* (New York: Annals of New York Academy of Sciences, 1973).

²John I. Goodlad and M. Frances Klein, *Behind the Classroom Door* (Worthington, OH: C. A. Jones, 1970).

³Rachel Sharp and Anthony Green, *Education and Social Control. A Study of Progressive Primary Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

The list of variables contributing to the theory-practice gap is seemingly endless. Indeed, all social phenomena are complex, and it is unlikely that any single explanation can capture the multiple, interrelated reasons for such a phenomenon. Therefore, I will focus on a limited number of reasons that I believe are most fundamental and most frequently overlooked.

The task here is also complex because the terms *curriculum theory* and *curriculum practice* are vague. For example, *curriculum practice* might refer to virtually anything done in an educational institution, but its meaning might also be more restricted. Some people, for instance, distinguish between *curriculum* (defined as the content to be taught) and *instruction* (defined as the process of delivering curriculum content); others use the term *curriculum practice* to refer only to the things consciously done to promote learning. Both these views, of course, dismiss the aspects of school learning that are a product of what some call the *hidden* or *informal curriculum*—the learning outcomes taught indirectly and often unconsciously by the processes of teaching and schooling.

Similarly, the term *curriculum theory* can have multiple meanings attached to it. The term is sometimes used as an antonym for empirical research in the field of curriculum, but it also has been used to characterize both the product of empirical inquiry and the starting assumptions that influence, either consciously or unconsciously, the formation of hypotheses and research questions.

For the purpose of this article, I have defined the terms *curriculum theory* and *curriculum practice* broadly. *Curriculum practice* refers to actions occurring in educational institutions that either intentionally or unintentionally influence the way students think, behave, or feel. *Curriculum theory* refers to ideas about this action, whether the ideas are generated by armchair theorizing, more scholarly forms of critical reflection, or empirical research.

Two types of curriculum theory are discussed. The first, *control-oriented curriculum theory*, attempts to dictate the conditions that will produce particular learning outcomes. Tyler's *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* and Mager's defense of behavioral objectives fit within the control-oriented tradition.⁴ Research endeavors such as Project Follow Through, Aptitude \times Treatment interaction research, and process-product studies of teaching are attempts to either construct or validate control-oriented curriculum theories.⁵

⁴Ralph Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); Robert Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (Belmont, CA: Pitman Management and Training, 1984)

⁵Abt Associates, *Education as Experimentation. A Planned Variation Model*, Vol. IV A-D (Boston: Abt Associates, 1977); Lee J. Cronbach, "The Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology," *American Psychologist* 12 (November 1957), 671-684; Nathaniel L. Gage, *The Scientific Basis of the Art of Teaching* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978)

The second type, *emancipation-oriented curriculum theory*, is, to some extent, a reaction against control-oriented theory and curriculum practice that consciously or unconsciously control students' thoughts and actions. The term encompasses both the theories of Pinar and Grumet, viewing control and emancipation primarily in psychological terms, and the theories of Apple and Giroux, viewing control and emancipation mainly sociologically.⁶

My thesis is simple. Control- and emancipation-oriented curriculum theories have limited effect on classroom practice for basically opposite reasons. Control-oriented theories underestimate the idiosyncratic nature of classroom phenomena, and emancipatory theories underestimate the need, at both the individual and organizational levels, for structures maintaining the illusion that phenomena are not nearly as idiosyncratic as they really are.

CONTROL-ORIENTED CURRICULUM THEORY

The Traditional View

In 1910, Thorndike summarized the goal of control-oriented curriculum theory in the lead article of the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Educational Psychology*:

A complete science of psychology would tell every fact about everyone's intellect and character and behavior, would tell the cause of every change in human nature, would tell the result which every educational force—every act of every person that changed any other or the agent himself—would have. It would aid us to use human beings for the world's welfare with the same surety of the result that we now have when we use falling bodies or chemical elements. In proportion as we get such a science we shall become masters of our own souls as we now are masters of heat and light. Progress toward such a science is being made.⁷

Thorndike's goal still motivates researchers, curriculum developers, and policymakers. In the late 1960s and early '70s, for instance, the U.S. government funded a massive planned-variation study called Project Follow Through that was designed to determine which early childhood curriculum was most effective.⁸ At about the same time, Cronbach and his colleagues were searching for what they called "Aptitude \times Treatment interactions." In a 1957 speech before the American Psychological Association, Cronbach suggested that Thorndike's dream of a "complete science of psychology" was within reach if educational

⁶William F. Pinar and Madeleine R. Grumet, *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1976); Michael W. Apple, *Education and Power* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Michael H. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Henry A. Giroux, *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

⁷Edward L. Thorndike, "The Contribution of Psychology to Education," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 1 (January 1910): 5–12.

⁸Abt Associates, *Education as Experimentation: A Planned Variation Model*, Vol. IV A-D (Boston: Abt Associates, 1977).

researchers would stop studying the effects of curriculum (or in Cronbach's words, "educational treatments") on groups of individuals and instead begin to examine how different types of curriculums affect different types of individuals (in Cronbach's terms, individuals with different aptitudes).⁹

The current interest in developing different curriculums to accommodate different learning styles is an example of continuing efforts to apply Cronbach's reasoning to the field of curriculum. Similarly, the continuing emphasis on (1) using behaviorally defined objectives, (2) precisely measuring students' mastery of these objectives, and (3) studying the effect of different curricular and pedagogical practices on students' mastery of objectives suggests that many curriculum developers and researchers still accept Thorndike's control-oriented goals.

Challenges to Tradition

Despite continued acceptance of Thorndike's control orientation, the search for a control-oriented curriculum theory that can link particular practices with student learning outcomes has begun to resemble the search for the Holy Grail. The final report of the Project Follow Through study, for instance, claims to have discovered a link between certain curriculum practices and improved student learning, yet the data presented in the report indicate that certain schools employing the most "effective" practices produced the most dismal results, while other schools employing supposedly ineffective methods produced among the most impressive learning outcomes. A panel of scholars funded by the Ford Foundation to critique the Project Follow Through final report note the lesson about idiosyncrasy contained in the Project Follow Through data:

Local schools do seem to make a difference. The peculiarities of individual teachers, schools, neighborhoods, and homes influence pupils' achievement far more than whatever is captured by labels such as "basic skills" or "affective" education.¹⁰

Cronbach's experiences with Aptitude \times Treatment interaction research have led him to similar conclusions. Less than 20 years after lauding the benefits of the Aptitude \times Treatment interaction approach, Cronbach stood once more before the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association and confessed that in his earlier address he had seriously underestimated the complexity of human beings. Even if we focus our attention on different learning styles (or, in Cronbach's words, different aptitudes), real people will inevitably be more complex than the learning styles delineated:

⁹Lee J. Cronbach, "The Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology," *American Psychologist* 12 (November 1957): 671-684.

¹⁰Ernest R. House, Gene V. Glass, Leslie D. McLean, and Decker F. Walker, "No Simple Answer: Critique of the Follow-Through Evaluation," *Educational Leadership* 35 (March 1978): 462.

An ATI [Aptitude \times Treatment interaction] result can be taken as a general conclusion only if it is not in turn moderated by further variables. If Aptitude \times Treatment \times Sex interact, for example, then the Aptitude \times Treatment effect does not tell the story. Once we attend to interactions, we enter a hall of mirrors that extends to infinity. However far we carry our analysis—to third order or fifth order or any other—untested interactions of still higher order can be envisioned.¹¹

Cronbach notes that the problem of higher order interactions was compounded in the human sciences by the cultural component of generalizations and the changeability of culture. The first part of the argument involves a distinction between the natural and social sciences, also articulated by Schutz.

The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not "mean" anything to molecules, atoms, and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist—social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of commonsense constructs they have preselected and preinterpreted this world, which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behavior by motivating it. . . . Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, that is, constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene.¹²

The second part of Cronbach's explanation of the effect of culture on social science relates to the changeability of culture in contemporary society. Cronbach argues convincingly that as culture changes, researchers' generalizations quickly become out of date. He cites as an example Bronfenbrenner's historical look at child-rearing practices of middle- and lower-class parents. Class differences documented in the 1950s were often the reverse of practices that had been observed in the 1930s. Cronbach concludes.

The trouble, as I see it, is that we cannot store up generalizations and constructs for ultimate assembly into a network. It is as if we needed a gross of dry cells to power an engine and could only make one a month. The energy would leak out of the first cells before we had half the battery completed. So it is with the potency of our generalizations.¹³

What psychologists such as Cronbach have said about the complexity of individuals, organizational theorists have said about the complexity of organizations. Anthropologist George Spindler, for instance, has talked of the complexity and idiosyncratic nature of organizations in his critique of the evaluation of the Youth Employment Demonstration Act. This evaluation employed a discrepancy-evaluation model, it evaluated programs in each site

¹¹Lee J. Cronbach, "Beyond the Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology," *American Psychologist* 30 (February 1975): 119.

¹²Alfred Schutz, "Concept and Theory Formation in Social Sciences," in *Sociological Theory and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Dorothy Emmet and Alisdair MacIntyre (New York: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 1-19.

¹³Lee J. Cronbach, "Beyond the Two Disciplines of Scientific Psychology," *American Psychologist* 30 (February 1975): 123.

in terms of how they conformed to a program that had been judged successful in a model site. In critiquing this procedure, Spindler comments.

My first reaction was, "Why would anyone expect different programs in different urban sites to replicate a model program in another site?" This expectation is against the first law of sociocultural systems in that all such systems (and a program of any kind is a sociocultural system) are adaptations to their environment. We should expect each program to show significant deviation from an initiating model, and from each of the other programs. The question should not be, "Do they deviate?" or even "How do they deviate?", but rather, "Are they adapting well (functionally) to their respective environments?"¹⁴

Implications

All this talk about the idiosyncratic nature of organizations and individuals suggests a fundamental cause of the theory-practice gap that exists for those operating from a control orientation. The gap is unavoidable. Even when curriculum theory emerges from the most methodologically sophisticated empirical research possible, even when that research attempts to accommodate the complexity of the real world by focusing on individual differences (e.g., different learning styles) and differences in school environments (e.g., differences between urban, rural, and suburban settings), real people and real places inevitably are far more complex than researchers' and theoreticians' ideal types. Clearly, Thorndike promises too much when he talks in terms of researchers providing "surety of result" in a field such as education.¹⁵

Thus, the theory-practice gap is not so much a problem to be resolved. Indeed, a resolution is impossible. Rather than attempting to solve the theory-practice problem, we must rethink the role that research and theory should be expected to play in the realm of practice.

Theory and research most certainly cannot provide foolproof recipes for practice. Curriculum theory (even theory grounded in the most sophisticated empirical research) can no longer be seen as a body of validated conclusions, rather, it is a collection of hypotheses that classroom teachers must constantly retest in particular classrooms with particular individuals.

¹⁴George Spindler, quoted in David M. Fetterman, "Blaming the Victim: The Problem of Evaluation Design and Federal Involvement, and Reinforcing World Views in Education," *Human Organization* 40 (Spring 1981): 70.

¹⁵Various scholars—including the emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists—have emphasized the power of social science to mute idiosyncrasy and socially reconstruct reality in its own oversimplified image. If a student is labeled as having a certain learning style or certain intellectual abilities or deficiencies, for example, that student tends to conform to the label to a greater extent than if the label had not been applied. However, unless individuals inhabit one of Goffman's total institutions—an asylum in which life is totally regulated and human interactions totally controlled—the power of social research to socially reconstruct reality will still be limited, and a significant gap between the ideal typical world of the theoretician and the real world of the practitioner will continue to exist. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961).

At the levels of policy and practice, we should sympathize with efforts to empower teachers and be skeptical of such things as teacher-proof curricula and so-called scientific approaches to teacher evaluation.¹⁶ Even if a curriculum could be teacher proofed (a questionable assumption at best considering the loosely coupled nature of educational organizations¹⁷), and even if research showed that a teacher-proof curriculum was effective for most students, the curriculum would still be dysfunctional for many individual students. To meet the needs of individual students, teachers will need the freedom to depart from a curriculum's standard operating procedures. Teacher empowerment, then, is not so much a grab for political power as it is a pedagogical necessity.

Similarly, teacher-evaluation instruments should be approached with healthy skepticism. States such as Florida and Tennessee have codified teacher-effectiveness research findings into evaluation instruments that are then used to assess teacher competence. Many school districts have approached teacher evaluation in similar ways. Teacher-effectiveness studies, however, like all research, can produce only probabilistic generalizations. At best, probabilistic generalizations tell us that certain curricular practices will be effective for most students in most settings. Implicit in this finding, however, is another, equally important, finding: For some students in some settings, the "effective" methods will not work. If teachers are to help all students learn, they will sometimes have to adjust and even abandon rules generated from probabilistic findings.

Evaluation systems must accommodate this need to break the rules. Rather than thinking of evaluation as a process of using instruments validated by scientific research, we should view evaluation as a process similar to a legal proceeding. This approach would still allow us to use instruments to generate evidence of teacher competence, but we could also consider teachers' "testimony" on why they broke rules and abandoned standard operating procedures.¹⁸

We must also rethink the sort of research we value. Traditionally, we have valued experimental and quasi-experimental studies that validate our theories and hypotheses. We have stressed using large samples and established statistical procedures to guarantee the generalizability of our theories.

¹⁶An example of a teacher-proof curriculum is *Distar*. See, for example, Siegfried Engelmann and D. Carmine, *Distar Arithmetic I. An Instructional System* (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1975), *Distar Reading I Sampler Kit* (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1974).

¹⁷For a discussion of the theory of loose coupling, see Karl E. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21 (March 1976) 1-19.

¹⁸For a further discussion, see Philip C. Schlecty, "Evaluation Procedures in the Charlotte-Mecklenberg Career Ladder Plan" (Charlotte-Mecklenberg [North Carolina] Schools, n.d.). Schlecty describes a teacher-evaluation process that employs the findings of teacher-effectiveness research as initial criteria to assess teachers. As part of the evaluation process, however, teachers have an opportunity to explain why they deviated from the normal criteria. The evaluation procedures are modeled more on legal proceedings than on the scientific experiment.

Because of the problem of idiosyncrasy, however, no research finding and no theory will ever generalize to every setting and to every child. The best that any piece of research can do is provide practitioners with probabilistic generalizations that can serve as hypotheses in the field, the practitioner's clinical ability will still be required to determine whether a particular hypothesis applies to a particular child in a particular setting, whether the hypothesis needs to be altered to accommodate the idiosyncrasy of place and person, or whether the hypothesis must be abandoned entirely.

This realization should cause us to reconsider the utility of case-study research, which traditionally we have considered second rate because it can only generate hypotheses. Because all any research can do whenever we are concerned with helping individuals is generate hypotheses, case study research may not be as inferior as we once thought. (Indeed, case-study research may actually be superior to other forms of research because well-written case studies can provide the reader with vicarious experience and enhance the reader's clinical judgment much as actual experience does.¹⁹)

Because even the most statistically valid generalizations may not apply to particular classrooms and particular students, might the time, effort, and money required for large-scale research studies be better spent on helping teachers learn the techniques of action research and on creating the kinds of working conditions (e.g., reduced class size, additional preparation periods) that will make action research a real possibility?²⁰ With limited educational resources, we cannot sidestep questions of cost-effectiveness. If university based research cannot provide recipes for practice, then it loses its privileged position in the resource-allocation game.

Summary

In the past, control-oriented curriculum theorists have either underestimated or ignored the problem of idiosyncrasy. When we take into account this problem, we are forced to reconsider notions that have become sacrosanct to some. In particular, we must reconsider the role of the teacher, the utility of teacher-proof curriculums, the validity of teacher-evaluation instruments, and the value of different forms of research.

¹⁹The argument is based on a radically different conception of generalizability than has been traditionally used by researchers. Because the traditional conception can no longer be considered viable in a field concerned with individuals rather than aggregates, it makes sense to talk and think of generalizability in terms of schema theory, in particular the Piagetian notions of assimilation, accommodation, integration, and differentiation. See Robert Donnemeyer, "Generalizability and the Single Case Study," in *Issues in Qualitative Research*, ed. Elliot W. Eisner and Alan Peshkin (New York: Teachers College Press, in press).

²⁰For a succinct description of the action-research process in education, see Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, *The Action Research Planner* (Geelong, Australia: Deakin University Press, 1982).

EMANCIPATION-ORIENTED CURRICULUM THEORY

The Orthodoxy

While control-oriented curriculum theorists simply assume that the purpose of schooling is to control the ways students think, feel, and behave, emancipation-oriented theorists find the whole notion of control problematic. Emancipation-oriented theorists claim that the school curriculum—especially the informal or hidden curriculum that is taught indirectly through the way such things as time, knowledge, students, and instruction are organized—helps reify culturally created ideas and structures, the curriculum helps make cultural artifacts appear natural and inevitable. Emancipation-oriented theorists suggest that the school curriculum helps legitimate and perpetuate (1) gender, race, and class stereotypes, (2) a dependency on established societal structures and those in positions of authority, (3) competitiveness rather than cooperation, and (4) a willingness to work for extrinsic rewards (e.g., gold stars, grades, higher salaries, promotions) rather than intrinsic satisfaction.

Emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists influenced primarily by existentialism and phenomenology suggest that emancipation lies in a process of personal analysis sometimes referred to as the *autobiographical method*. In contrast, emancipation-oriented theorists relying on neo-Marxist critiques of society tend to emphasize the need to radically reform society as a prerequisite for emancipation. For our purposes, the differences between the two groups are not particularly significant because both rail against the control orientation of more traditional curriculum theorists. This indiscriminate attack on the notion of control is the main difficulty in making emancipation-oriented curriculum theory of whichever variety relevant to practitioners.

Virtually all emancipation-oriented theorists have treated the notion of control as a sort of bogeyman, an unquestioned evil to be opposed by any curriculum theorist who is noble and meritorious. The title of the Pinar and Grumet book, *Toward a Poor Curriculum*, suggests the disdain existentialist-oriented theorists have for curriculums that attempt to control the way students think, feel, and behave.²¹ A similar disdain is evident in the attacks of more sociologically oriented theorists on the notion of technocratic rationality, which Giroux tells us "takes as its guiding interest the elements of control, prediction, and certainty."²² Even theorists who have avoided the polemical tone that often characterizes emancipation-oriented discourse have failed to take seriously the possibility that control, in one form or another, may be a necessary, even desirable, part of living in the world.

²¹William F. Pinar and Madeleine R. Grumet, *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1976).

²²Henry A. Giroux, *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), p. 9

Challenges to the Orthodoxy

Support for the proposition that both individuals and organizations need some sort of control, some sort of structure that limits options and restricts possibilities, is easy to find, however. Cognitive psychologist Ulric Neisser, for instance, demonstrates that even the most rudimentary acts of perception are controlled by the perceiver's preconceptions and expectations, what he calls the knower's *anticipatory schemata*.²³ Similarly, Piagetian theory reminds us that for the knower to accommodate novelty in the environment, the novel aspects of the environment must be assimilated into the knower's existing cognitive structures.²⁴

Emancipation-oriented theorists rightfully challenge the naive Piagetian view that accommodation will automatically accompany assimilation, that the knower's cognitive structures will necessarily become more differentiated and integrated with more experiences. They recognize that reality is often socially constructed and that various forms of psychic and social control can often constrict perception and limit understanding. What most emancipation oriented theorists fail to acknowledge, however, is the individual's need for some sort of socially constructed world.

Emancipation-oriented theorists overlook the fact that if we had to confront each new event in our life and treat it as if it were unique—if we had no categories, no ideal typical constructs in our head to bring order and coherence to an idiosyncratic world—we could not function. We would, literally, be mad. Language, even a personal language with which to talk to ourselves, would be impossible because words are merely referents for general categories.

The need to socially construct reality is particularly evident in complex professions such as teaching. Teachers must work in a highly complex environment. The sheer number of students the teacher has to deal with—each idiosyncratic, each a mass of higher order interactions, and each influenced by an ever-changing culture—guarantees that the teacher must function in a highly unpredictable world. Little wonder, then, that teachers attempt to bring some order out of their chaos by socially reconstructing reality in a more simplified form.

Not surprisingly, researchers have discovered that teachers label their students and then behave in ways that make their labels self-fulfilling prophecies. Further, researchers studying teacher thinking and planning procedures have discovered that when teachers plan, they follow neither the highly rational approach advanced by behavioral objectives advocates nor the creative

²³Ulric Neisser, *Cognition and Reality: Principles and Implications of Cognitive Psychology* (San Francisco, Freeman, 1976)

²⁴Jean Piaget, *Biology and Knowledge: An Essay on the Relations Between Organic, Regulations and Cognitive Processes*, trans B Welsh (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1971)

and artistic expressive-activity approach developed by Eisner.²⁵ Rather, teachers use a repertoire of routines and standard operating procedures adjusted to accommodate new curricular demands and to meet emerging needs.

Emancipation-oriented theorists have invariably viewed these actions negatively, to them, the actions result from either inadequacies in the teachers themselves or inadequacies in the social system in which the teachers live and work. The theorists have virtually ignored individuals' need to simplify and bring some semblance of order and control to a highly complex and idiosyncratic world.

What can be said about individuals can also be said about organizations. Indeed, the whole notion of an organization has implicit within it some notion of control, it implies some sort of established structure, established ways of doing things, specified roles people must play, a common language, and commonly accepted meanings associated with that language.

Control—including some sort of hierarchical structure—seems particularly inevitable in complex, modern societies. Sociologist Robert Michels made this point in 1911 when he discussed the "iron law of oligarchy."²⁶ Michels was a socialist concerned with the question of why political parties and trade unions that espoused democratic principles and aspired to be democratic inevitably behaved in decidedly undemocratic ways. Michels's classic analysis rejects previous psychological explanations (i.e., explanations stressing the leaders' impure motives) and suggests, instead, that certain organizational needs (e.g., the need to make decisions quickly and to cope with complexity) make some form of hierarchical control inevitable. Michels emphasizes that these organizational inevitabilities cut across ideologies and economic systems. "He who says organization," Michels declares, "says oligarchy."

One would be hard-pressed today to find evidence in contemporary society to disprove Michels's simple equation. Even in socialist countries, the power of Lenin's vanguard has not diminished significantly with the passage of time.

Anthropologists have also discussed the link between organizations and control, as well as the link between control and education. Although emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists criticize the school's role in legitimating and perpetuating existing control mechanisms, anthropologists generally accept as givens (1) that organizations will inevitably attempt to reproduce themselves and (2) that the primary role of formal education—the

²⁵Christopher M. Clark and Robert J. Yinger, "Research on Teacher Thinking," *Curriculum Inquiry* 7 (Winter 1977) 279–304, Robert Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (Belmont, CA: Pitman Management and Training, 1984), Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

²⁶Robert Michels, *Political Parties. A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Free Press, 1962).

initiation rites of traditional societies or the schools of modern societies—is cultural transmission.²⁷

In modern societies, particularly in those aspiring to democracy, schools are expected to play a more reformist and a more egalitarian role. Leftist critics, including emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists, perform a major service when they point out gaps between rhetoric and reality. For their work to be useful for practitioners, however, emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists must move beyond blanket condemnations of the notion of control.

Emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists need a new realism. These theorists must move beyond merely critiquing what is wrong with current practice and begin to develop alternative ways of operating schools and classrooms. Furthermore, the alternatives must take into account psychological and organizational necessities that cut across ideologies and economic systems.

The recent focus on the phenomena of resistance—the tendency of individuals in an organization to subvert the system—reminds us that, even in capitalist societies, individuals have more freedom than we once thought (no need to wait for the revolution to act!). The focus on resistance also has the potential of producing badly needed concrete models of how practitioners with an emancipation orientation might behave in the realm of educational practice. The work of certain theorists in the field is also encouraging. Joel Taxel, Jean Anyon, Andrew Gitlin, and Nancy King have grappled publicly in symposia at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting and elsewhere with how their curriculum theory affects their own work as university teachers; Giroux has tried to articulate what an emancipation-oriented perspective means for social studies teachers; and Shor has tried to translate Freire's critical pedagogy to literacy teaching and learning in university settings and elsewhere.²⁸

This work, however, is still in its infancy. A form of collaborative action research involving emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists and practitioners sympathetic with their views is needed.²⁹ Emancipation-oriented theorists and practitioners must answer many questions. How can teachers avoid creating self-fulfilling prophecies about students from different ethnic groups yet still accommodate and value ethnic diversity? Ethnic differences, after all, are not only social constructions. Children from primarily oral cultures, for instance, will likely be less proficient with written language when they enter

²⁷George Spindler, *Education and the Cultural Process. Toward an Anthropology of Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1974).

²⁸Henry A. Giroux, *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Oppressed* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1983), pp. 168–204; Ira Shor, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)

²⁹For a discussion of action research done from an emancipation-oriented perspective, see Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis, *Becoming Critical. Education, Knowledge, and Action Research* (London: Falmer Press, 1986)

school. This difference is likely to be real, not simply a product of the teacher's imagination, and teachers need strategies to confront these differences in ways that will not perpetuate existing inequalities.

Similarly, how can principals or superintendents sympathetic with emancipation-oriented analyses of education behave on a day-to-day basis? We need to know not only how they subvert the system (the much-talked-about phenomenon of resistance) but how they cope with the inevitabilities of organizational life that cut across economic systems and ideologies.

Also, because some sort of hierarchy will always be a part of modern and post-modern society, how can educators play the role of gatekeeper more justly? And because teachers will always need to simplify the complex world of the classroom, how can they classify and group students more fairly?

In answering these questions, emancipation-oriented action researchers would begin where more conventional research ends. Consider the question about classifying and grouping students. Sharp and Green, in their classic study, ended their work when they had discovered that teachers in an innovative British primary school espousing egalitarian ideals still unconsciously thought of their students in class terms, behaved differently with students from different classes, and fostered the same sort of inequality promoted by more conventional, less egalitarian schools and teachers.³⁰ Simply reporting these findings to the teachers studied or to other well-meaning egalitarian teachers does little to ameliorate the problem. Teachers need some way to simplify their complex environments. Unless alternative ways are developed, even well-meaning and well-informed teachers will probably have to rely on the commonsense categories they have at their disposal.

It is not satisfactory to simply wait for the sort of dramatic restructuring of the larger society that emancipation-oriented theorists assume will create a more egalitarian form of common sense satisfactory. Even if dramatic social restructuring should occur, Michels's iron law of oligarchy suggests that hierarchical control will not go away with a shift in economic system or ideology. We need new ways of classifying students, ways that will meet teachers' need for simplicity and be more just than the class-oriented categories now available to teachers. Emancipation-oriented theorists, together with their practitioner collaborators, must begin to undertake this task.

Or in the language of emancipation-oriented theorists, it is time to take the notion of praxis, the linking of thought and action, seriously. British leftist sociologist and criminologist Jock Young provides a model for the kind of activity needed.³¹

Young adopts a strategy that he characterizes as realism and contrasts with idealism (the liberal view that knowledge will, in and of itself, bring

³⁰Rachel Sharp and Anthony Green, *Education and Social Control. A Study of Progressive Primary Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

³¹Jock Young, *Realist Criminology* (London: Gower, 1987)

social change) and utopianism (the radical view that academics' vision of a just society will come to pass once the revolution has occurred). Young and some of his colleagues have moved beyond the confines of academia and the traditional academician roles of observer and critic and worked with Britain's Labor Party to develop a leftist approach to law and order. Their approach takes the form of specific proposals that they had hoped would convince voters to defeat the Thatcher government and elect a Labor government. Young and his colleagues expected their proposal to be implemented had the Thatcher government been defeated and a new Labor government installed.

What Young has done with politicians in the area of curriculum policy, emancipation-oriented curriculum theorists must do with practitioners in the field of education. Some dangers are inherent in such a strategy, of course. For instance, other Left-leaning academics have criticized Young's realism for being too conservative, and we could argue that the problem is not so much with Young but with the whole realist approach. Realism, as Young defines it, implies working within the system, and so the options available to scholars will always be constrained by the system. The questions collaborative action research would ask would presume that schools would and should continue to exist. More radical proposals (e.g., Illich's deschooling option) would never even get on the realist's agenda.

Thus, the price for adopting a realist approach to emancipation-oriented curriculum theory may be too high for some theorists. The price of not adopting this approach, however, is also great. Emancipation-oriented curriculum theory will continue to have little to say to practitioners and little effect on the real world.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum theory has had limited effect on curriculum practice. Here I have focused on the most fundamental and most often overlooked reasons. Control-oriented curriculum theory underestimates the idiosyncratic nature of individuals and organizations and thus overestimates the ability of educators to control outcomes. Therefore, control-oriented theorists must rethink the purpose of empirical research and reconsider what kinds of research are most valuable. Emancipation-oriented curriculum theory, on the other hand, underestimates the need to bring some semblance of order and control into an idiosyncratic world. I have suggested an agenda of questions that would make emancipation-oriented theory more realistic and more likely to be used by practitioners.

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