THEORIES EMBEDDED IN THE EVENTS OF CLINICAL SUPERVISION:
A HERMENEUTIC APPROACH

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As I consider the context of clinical supervision, the words of a beloved hermeneutic philosopher come to mind. Kermit the Frog, in the song "The Rainbow Connection," says, "Somebody thought of it and someone believed it / Look what it's done so far." So it is with clinical supervision. In one sense, Morris Cogan thought of it, and Robert Goldhammer and others believed it. Through their interpretations, we can "look what it's done so far." We have created an identifiable entity with a life apart from the original authors. Thus, clinical supervision can probably best be described as an intellectual tradition (albeit a modest one). Its contributors come from diverse perspectives, and each one tries to capture the essence of clinical supervision and construe it for a particular purpose. For those who need a reified version of clinical supervision, this diversity causes considerable upset. (Witness the title of an Association of Teacher Educator's conference session a few years ago, "Will the Real Clinical Supervision Please Stand Up.") We raise issues of legitimacy periodically as part of the discourse in the field. Yet, after all, the discourse, both scholarly and not-so-scholarly, gives the tradition its vitality.

Although Cogan and Goldhammer are the acknowledged seminal authors in the tradition,¹ their notions of "clinical experience" and "clinical professorship" were echoing through the educational environment at Harvard in the 1940s and '50s.² James Conant, then president of Harvard, proposed that there be "intermediaries between the basic social sciences and the future practitioner" and, in particular, "that the induction of the teacher into a classroom through practice teaching should be under the supervision of an experienced school teacher who holds high rank as a university professor

and ... should also be in close touch with the new developments in the educational sciences." In their activities at Harvard in the 1950s, Cogan and Goldhammer worked in clinical programs and fashioned their pictures of in-class supervision from the daily events of practice. Cogan calls his depiction a rationale, and Goldhammer writes about methods. Yet both, in their writing, stay close to the events of in-class supervision for their descriptions. Most educators accept establishing a relationship with the teacher, observing classroom teaching, analyzing classroom scenarios, and holding a conference with the teacher as the basic events of clinical supervisory practice. To view the events in methodological form, both authors compartmentalized the events. Cogan called them phases, Goldhammer labeled them stages. Their texts established the basis for subsequent interpretations of the nascent practice.

Instrumental versions of clinical supervision began to emerge from the Cogan and Goldhammer texts. Mosher and Purpel have plucked out of the larger picture of clinical supervision a piece that they claim is a general objective: "planning for, observation, analysis, and treatment of the teacher's classroom performance." The piece they describe in one chapter defines clinical supervision as the "actual [i.e., observable] teaching performance and the results of the teaching." Here we begin to see clinical supervision viewed functionally as an instrument, or tool, in their interpretation of in-class supervision. They stress counseling theory and, in particular, ego counseling, for the basis of supervisory practice.

In Techniques in the Clinical Supervision of Teachers, Acheson and Gall expand their instrumental version to include functional applications for planning, observing, and holding conferences with teachers. Glickman frames his version of supervision in developmental theories grounded in psychology, and he uses clinical supervision instrumentally as in-class supervision. Glatt horn "differentiates" clinical supervision from what he calls cooperative professional development, self-directed development, and administrative monitoring. McGreal is typical of the evaluation enterprise that has coopted clinical supervision for the practice of in-class evaluation of teaching. The list of narrow instrumental versions goes on and on.

Instrumental thinking has led to a form of commodification of clinical supervision. Educational entrepreneurs have developed training packages and

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5Keith Acheson and Meredith Gall, Techniques in the Clinical Supervision of Teachers. Preservice and In-service Applications (New York: Longman, 1980).
lucrative consulting services. Erlene Minton, Sue Welsh, Madeline Hunter, and of course, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development are typical of those who help to cast clinical supervision as a marketable item, portable enough to dispense in films, tapes, and brochures for one- or two-day workshops. In turn, the politization of clinical supervision flourishes as state-level initiatives include clinical supervision as a vehicle for school reform, especially through districtwide accountability programs.⁹

Despite the “uses and abuses” approach to clinical supervision, scholars and practitioners remain and contribute to the tradition, which Smyth has characterized in several articles as the “robust nature” of this idea and its ability to survive over time. In 1976, the Journal of Research and Development in Education devoted an entire issue to clinical supervision, and in his article, Sergiovanni expressed a view similar to Smyth’s: “The intellectual capital inherent in clinical supervision is in my view more important than its work flow as articulated into steps, strategies, and procedures.”¹⁰ In 1980, it was still possible to contain a bibliography of articles on clinical supervision; that is no longer the case.¹¹ That same year, Anderson and Krajewski published a second edition of the Goldhammer text.¹² Undoubtedly, the most prolific scholar today in the field is John Smyth of Australia, who has combined a critical theory approach to the practice of clinical supervision. Smyth has also edited Learning about Teaching through Clinical Supervision, bringing together in that volume known scholars in the field.¹³ We are beginning to get critical theoretic perspectives from those outside the field who analyze and critique clinical supervision in terms of social and political “power regimes.”¹⁴ So clinical supervision grows rich with interpretations through the discourse carried on within the tradition.

THEORETIC UNDERPINNINGS

Cogan and Goldhammer didn’t invent clinical supervision. They experienced it intensely in the context of daily life in the clinical setting of the master of arts in teaching teacher-education program. They developed, in a grounded-

theory way, the substantive theories to explain the phenomena already there for them to represent. Their representations took the form of the events they were living and reflecting about. I do not think of either one as instrumentalists in their writing, but I recognize Cogan's dilemma. He was caught under the pervasive influence of the rationalist view of science and struggled to provide a logical portrayal of the practice of clinical supervision in spite of the pressure he continually felt.\\^15

Thirty some years later, it may be time to look deeper into the events of clinical supervision to search for "immanent meanings," as Husserl says.\\^16 These immanent meanings represent the essences of events, the theoretic meanings that are more or less universal-like because they allow us to go beyond the procedural nature of the events themselves. In this way, we can generate understandings about the practice so that we can create new procedures and techniques that still remain faithful to the intellectual spirit of the clinical supervision tradition. By taking a hermeneutic view, we can unlock the events of clinical supervision to reveal some embedded theories that may represent the essences of the events.\\^17

A THEORY OF CONSENSUAL DOMAIN: ESTABLISHING A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

In Cogan's version of clinical supervision, the first phase is "establishing the teacher-supervisor relationship." During this period, the supervisor

- establishes the clinical relationship between himself and the teacher;
- helps the teacher to achieve some general understandings about clinical supervision and a perspective on its sequences; and
- begins to induct the teacher into his new role and functions in supervision. These first-phase operations are generally well advanced before the supervisor enters the teacher's classroom to observe his teaching.\\^18

In the second edition of Goldhammer, this relationship is based on the supervisor's ability to establish "rapport nurturance":

\\^15This ambivalence—between the need to be more "scientific" and the pitfalls of scientism—was expressed by Cogan in several of my conversations with him.
\\^17Hermeneutics is a part of a philosophic tradition commonly described as the art (and sometimes, science) of interpreting language. It is the study of understanding, especially the task of understanding texts. Background references for this paper include Josef Bletcher, The Hermeneutic Imagination: Outline of a Positive Critique of Scientism and Sociology (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Roy Howard, Three Faces of Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Current Theories of Understanding (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Richard Palmer, Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer ( Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969); Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, ed. and trans. J. B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
...the nourishing and developing of a harmonious relationship between the clinical supervisor and the teachers. The responsibility for nourishing this type of relationship belongs to the clinical supervisor. The nurturance must be a continual, conscious process. It necessitates use of human relations skills, in appropriate degrees and with appropriate timing.19

This condition is confirmed as part of Goldhammer’s first step, “the pre-observation conference.” From these descriptions, we get a sense that the supervisor is responsible for creating an understanding with the teacher that the two will have a working relationship with genuine reciprocity. The theory of consensual domain does not reject or replace this notion; it does, however, help to explain the inherent difficulties in the rationale.

The term consensual domain was originally explicated by Humberto Maturana, a Chilean neurobiologist whose work has centered on understanding how biological processes can give rise to the phenomena of cognition and language.20 In effect, consensual domain is a theory of learning. One of Maturana’s main objectives is to overcome the tendency (imposed on us by our language) to treat mental terms as though they could be meaningfully taken as descriptions of state or structure. For our purpose here, the “structure” is our proclivity to construe the actions of clinical supervision as models or techniques—a representation to be carried out in its formally construed stable state. Authors and researchers who treat clinical supervision in this fashion perpetuate, as Maturana would say, “the fallacy of instructive interaction” when they try to deal with the actions of educational events by making them into models. In simple terms, Maturana suggests that we do not learn to think and behave in certain ways through external models as representations of events. We learn in consensual domains through which social interaction is presumed. By virtue of the discourse that we tacitly agree to and recognize, we create a linguistic domain that has as the central feature of human intelligence cooperative systems of consensual interactions. Language is a pattern of mutually orienting action. The consensual domain exists for a social community of cognition.

When Cogan and Goldhammer wrote about clinical supervision, they were experiencing the activities within the optimum consensual domain of clinical supervision. In the environment of the master of arts in teaching summer school program at Harvard, supervision was a taken-for-granted part of the program where everyone was expected to be a learner. Supervisors were in the same classrooms every day, meeting with teachers and interns before and after classroom visits and theorizing about effective teaching and


effective supervision as a matter of course. Clinical supervision was a consensual domain within that program. Other clinical contexts, such as student teaching in undergraduate education and counseling, have, for the most part, an established consensual domain for clinical supervision within those areas of pre-service study.

Over the years, clinical supervision has been a practice that is part of three different groups of people in three different environments: the pre-service teachers in education programs, the induction teachers who are just entering the profession, and the maturing professionals who are seasoned practitioners. The third group, the mature professionals, cannot easily become part of the consensual domain of clinical supervision. To further complicate the possibility, administrators and entrepreneurs have seized the term clinical supervision and forced it (by making it into a model) into another, more recognizable consensual domain in the public school—districtwide evaluation of teachers. In general, clinical supervision in the public school has become synonymous with teacher evaluation no matter how hard the scholars have insisted that supervision and evaluation are separate functions.

We must do more than think about “establishing a relationship,” even with the most nurturing and empathetic sense of rapport and support. Clinical supervision can be effective only if we understand the need for a consensual domain to be part of the practice. Consensual domain goes beyond the one-to-one interaction of two individuals. It involves a community consensus, a home, for the practice of clinical supervision.

OBSERVATION:
CREATING A TEXT

Cogan describes the observation phase as follows: “The supervisor observes the instruction in person and/or by way of other observers and other techniques for recording classroom events.”21 According to Goldhammer, “The principal purpose of Observation is to capture realities of the lesson objectively enough and comprehensively enough to enable Supervisor and Teacher to reconstruct the lesson as validly as possible afterwards, in order to analyze it.”22 In my own writing, I have emphasized the importance of “stable data,” a kind of incomplete recording of events from which the participants can render interpretations and judgments. I have shown, in research, that a lack of stable data can result in premature judgment and emotional distortions on the part of the supervisor or observer, as well as the other

What we are really talking about here is making records of classroom discourse that will allow us to "fix" the action so that we can later do something with it. Ricoeur reminds us that discourse exists only as temporal and present. In living speech, the instance of discourse has the character of a fleeting event. The event appears and disappears. Thus, there is a problem of fixation, of inscription. Ricoeur argues the hermeneutic over the rational view: "Meaningful action is an object for science only under the condition of a kind of objectification which is equivalent to the fixation of a discourse by writing. In the same way that interlocution is overcome in writing, interaction is overcome in numerous situations in which we treat action as a fixed text." In another sense, human action, like a text, is an open work, the meaning of which is "in suspense." Because human action "opens up" new references and receives fresh relevance from them, human deeds are also waiting for fresh interpretations to decide their meaning. All significant events and deeds are, in this way, open to practical interpretation through present praxis.

Keeping written records is not a new idea in clinical supervision. In the early days of the practice, Cogan and Goldhammer espoused the notion; it was, perhaps, the centerpiece of their substantive theories. During that time, however, the classroom-observation instruments were extremely popular. Cogan, in particular, was caught in this dilemma, and although he used "verbatim data" in his own practice and teaching, he devotes a chapter to interaction-analysis systems (most notably Flanders's) in his book (with cautionary warnings). The theoretic issue of "creating a text" calls into question assumptions about appropriate "data" for classroom records. Most important, the text issue points to the fatal flaw that we have been operating with in our practice. Our recorded approximations (classroom narratives, checklists, and even verbatim data) are subject to gross distortions because we operate from a rationalist, even scientific, point of view in our methods of analysis and judgment. A hermeneutic understanding of the nature of text (what we take to be text) and how we can, in good conscience, interpret text, can begin to get to the basis of this awesome challenge. Bruner emphasizes the need for understanding narrative, "story grammars," or formal descriptions of the minimum structure that yields stories or storylike sequences. He mentions that the "theoretical analysis of text interpretation (by whomever formulated it and whatever the textual data base of the analysis) yields only hypotheses
about actual readers." We might loosely borrow his thesis for supervision as follows: The supervisor's analysis of teaching (text interpretation) yields only a hypothesis about what the supervisor thinks about teaching. Basic to the practice of clinical supervision is the understanding of creating text as the basis of observation.

ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHING-LEARNING-PROCESS INQUIRY

Cogan describes analysis as follows:

Following the observation, the teacher and the supervisor analyze the events of the class. Initially, they usually perform this task separately. Later in the program they may do so together or with other participants. Decisions as to these procedures are made with the careful regard for the teacher's developing competencies in clinical supervision and his needs at the moment.

Both Cogan and Goldhammer heavily emphasize "pattern analysis" and "categories" of teaching behavior—that certain elements of any teacher's behavior tend to be repeated over and over again and that by locating these elements in the data the supervisor can formulate categories of teaching behavior to organize the data meaningfully.

Goldhammer suggest that this analysis is based on the assumption that human behavior is patterned; in certain respects, it is repetitious, and as a subset of general behavior, teaching is also patterned:

The analytical component of clinical supervision is intended to make it safer—less whimsical, less arbitrary, less superficial—than supervision of the past. And particularly when the teacher is trained to participate in analysis of his own teaching, based on the truest and most comprehensive representations of that teaching that can be created, his chances of experiencing profit from the enterprise are most favorable.

Here we begin to see the assumption of the rational or technical worldview laid over the process of clinical supervision. The use of direct classroom data and a rigorous analysis of that data has cast the process with a scientific-like aura, and although Cogan would not ascribe to this process as "doing science," scholars and practitioners after him proceeded as if it were.

"Doing science" or analysis is cast in a performance mode. The assumption is that analysis is performed by moving, coding, and storing information in systems. The supervisor is directed to perform an analysis (commonly a

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pattern analysis) on the data and render an inference based on the results. I am suggesting that we treat the text in an inquiry mode.

Dewey posits:

In the genuine operation of inference, the mind is in the attitude of search, of hunting, of projection, of trying this and that, when the conclusion is reached, the search is at an end. The Greeks used to discuss. "How is learning (or inquiry) possible? For either we know already what we are after, and then we do not learn or inquire; or we do not know, and then we cannot inquire, for we do not know what to look for." The dilemma is at least suggestive, for it points to the true alternative: the use in inquiry of doubt, of tentative suggestion, of experimentation. After we have reached the conclusion, a reconsideration of the steps of the process to see what is helpful, what is harmful, what is merely useless, assists in dealing more promptly and efficaciously with analogous problems in the future. In this way the method of organizing thought is built up.31

Dewey writes about the importance of uncertainty and inquiry in educational practice. His emphasis on reflective thinking is well known these days, as he suggests that by putting the consequences of different ways and lines of action before the mind, we can know what we are about when we act. Reflective thinking converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action.

I have written about the modes of inquiry that I believe are necessary for supervisory practice. discovery, verification, explanation, interpretation, and evaluation.32 The concept of modes of inquiry is derived from essentially different ways of knowing about the events of a classroom encounter.

Discovery has as a purpose the search for well-articulated phenomena and appropriate questions inherent in the classroom scenario. The search often begins by identifying the teacher's stated intent of the lesson and the signs of consistency or inconsistency as a result of subsequent actions. Sergiovanni describes discovery as "the concept of surfacing dilemmas" as we focus for productive results.33 The primary emphasis, however, is toward an eclectic approach free from a predetermined system. The supervisor and teacher continue to look for a fresh perspective in familiar situations through discovery.

Verification, a more or less deductive mode, provides for a degree of objectivity. After discovering the salient features of the lesson, the supervisor and teacher must verify the extent to which the discovery was justified. Objec-

tivity (or rather objectification, as Ricoeur describes) is a general frame of mind that helps each person to assume a more or less detached and somewhat neutral posture.34

Explanation is both inductive and deductive. Its purpose is to explain the verified phenomena through inference derived from working with the text. The supervisor and teacher bring their subjective “best estimates” of what is happening from their own reality base.

Interpretation is the search for meaning in the events under study. The interpretive mode often provides the way to get to what really matters, to derive mature interpretations from what has been verified and explained. It is the sanction to go beyond the literal, to look for deeper meanings than the inferences derived through explanation. The mode here may be reproductive because the teacher and supervisor are concerned with symbolic acts that reveal insights about the myths and predispositions of those involved. Through the interpretive mode, the supervisor and teacher can seek deeper significance beneath the surface content, which may appear trivial. In another sense, interpretation is a way to sense the trivial from the nontrivial meanings.

Evaluation, a normative mode, addresses values and judgments about the events under consideration. Evaluation approaches are used to determine the effectiveness of a particular action or the worthiness of the meaning. Evaluation in the form of critical theory can open new insights for the supervisor and teacher in looking at the political or social implications of classroom action. In the broader sense, inquiry in supervision opens the practice to issues of each participant’s orientation. The assumption is that underlying every orientation is a definite epistemology, axiology, and ontology. A person’s orientation consists of what he or she believes to be true, to be valuable, and to be real.35 Evaluation represents the perspective we take on practice, both teaching and supervision.

THE SUPERVISORY CONFERENCE:
AN EDUCATIVE ACT

Goldhammer says, “All roads lead to the conference.”36 Cogan resists a formal definition of the conference: “The clinical conference defines itself in its context. It is an integral part of the cycle of supervision.” He suggests that the conference is not a culmination of supervision, nor yet the most important part of the clinical program. In his images of the conference, he says:

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It is at one and the same time a constituent and development of everything that goes on before and after it. To approach this "contextual definition" from another angle, all working contracts between the teacher and supervisor are "conference" and should be imbued with the same purposes and governed by the same policies, care and forethought.\(^{37}\)

In my own writing, I have stated two unpopular interpretations of the conference as we know it. First, the formal conference generally suffers from its ritualistic nature as part of the school culture. Second, in the literature on supervision, the conference is vastly overrated as an educative event. I do not advocate eliminating supervisory meetings. But we have put too much educative stock in the conference. We assume that the conference is the place where we are going to help the teacher do different things in the classroom. Witness the vast writing about good "confereencing," suggesting that (1) we provide prescriptive suggestions for gaps in performance, (2) we tell the teacher what he or she could have done that wasn't done, (3) we reinforce the positive aspects of classroom practice, and (4) we label the events so we can build a vocabulary for professional practice (in other words, help the teacher develop a language to describe what teaching is about).\(^{38}\) These aspects are all viable, but as for the educative act itself, I think we have to go far beyond the conference as we now know it.

Before we can posit a rationale for the conference as an educative act, we must come to terms with its ritualistic nature. Conference patterns have mostly developed over time, and novice supervisors fall into typical scripts for conducting conferences with teachers.\(^{39}\) The major flaw of the ritualized conference is the responsibility the supervisor takes for the conference's direction. Typically, the supervisor has the records of the class (rarely shared with the teacher). The supervisor analyzes the classroom data. The supervisor asks most of the questions, and the teacher gives most of the answers. We take the nature of the supervisory conference for granted.

Cogan uses the term *working contracts* to suggest the meetings between the supervisor and teacher. He calls one of his phases *planning with the teacher* rather than *pre-observation conference*. The label suggest a genuine work session rather than a pro forma conference. This concept of a working session, with the intent that it be an educative session for both the teacher and the supervisor, is in order. Besides planning sessions, we might have study sessions (to understand a particular classroom dilemma better) and other major work sessions for various purposes. In a sense, the conference directly following the classroom observation could be a time to plan for a work session based on the nature of the inquiry. Perhaps, then, what follows

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\(^{37}\)Ibid., p. 196.


\(^{39}\)Noreen B. Garman, "Rites and Ritual in Supervisory Conferences" (working paper, University of Pittsburgh, 1987).
the conference, as the supervisor and teacher work together in earnest, may matter the most.

Here I have outlined embedded theories in the taken-for-granted events of clinical supervision. Of course, many important issues are not included in these descriptions. We can articulate supervisory practice only as we recognize the need to articulate a language for teaching, as we understand the need to construe the scenarios of teaching for the purpose of supervisory encounters. First, we must build the languages of teaching. Then, if we are serious about what we do, we must recognize how much of supervisory practice is now tailored to meet administrative convenience and is couched in “scientism” rather than sound supervisory practice based on moral justification. For example, it is almost universally accepted that clinical supervision means that a supervisor will observe a lesson, normally in one classroom period. Lesson generally means an episodic event taken out of context within a longer unit of study. It is time to consider the unfolding lesson as a major concept in clinical supervision. We must find ways to capture how a teacher unfolds the content of a particular unit of study and how students, over time, encounter the content. Taking a quick snapshot in that process is no longer good enough.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The general perspective of this paper has been the hermeneutic approach. The supervisor’s analysis of teaching (or text interpretation) yields only hypotheses about what the supervisor thinks about teaching. At some point in a teacher’s career, he or she must become a clinical supervisor of sorts, because only the actors themselves can render the hermeneutic knowledge needed to understand teaching. If we identify our role as a teacher, or a teacher educator, or both, generating this hermeneutic knowledge makes sense. If we identify our role as an administrator, a question arises about our ability to render useful insights into a world we do not live in (in the ontological sense), the world of teaching practice. If the “clinic” is the instructive mode implying a place and time where people practice (or rehearse) to become more skillful and scholarly about their work, then the participants agree, for that special period, to become learners—to bracket the experience of clinical supervision so that the events can be put into textual form, reviewed, inquired about, and set into perspective. People have a “willingness to struggle.” We make a commitment of time, a commitment to looking at the ordinary

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with an extraordinary sensibility, a commitment to letting go of our ego and
equilibrium for a while, and a commitment to certain methods and actions
associated with reflection and inquiry. Most of all, we commit to respecting
and caring for the people we work with. These commitments are all part of
the consensual domain of clinical supervision. We can no longer talk of
applying models of supervision and teaching to groups of people. We kid
ourselves if we think otherwise.

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Cherryholmes, Cleo H. Power and Criticism: Poststructural Investigations in

Cherryholmes distinguishes between structural and poststructural assumptions
in discourses-practices in three instances in education (Tyler, Schwab, Bloom).
He explores the relevance of the thought of the phenomenologists, of Haberman,
of Foucault, and of Derrida to the meaning of texts, to the theory-practice
distinction, to construct validity in research, and to curriculum. He compares
and contrasts the uses of phenomenology, critical theory, interpretive analytics,
and deconstruction in research, giving examples of textual reading, interpreta-
tion, criticism, communication, and evaluation. This primer introduces curricu-
larists and other educators to perspectives of power and critical pragmatics.

Reynolds, William M. Reading Curriculum Theory: The Development of a New

Reynolds shares his personal experience of reading traditional, reconceptualist,
and reproductionist curriculum literature written over the last two decades. In
this journey, he articulates Ricoeur’s hermeneutics and employs his processes of
textual interpretation to the Paideia Proposal and A Nation at Risk (conservative
texts), to Pinar’s Society, Madness (reconceptualist text), and to Apple’s Logic of
Technical Control (reproductionist text), among others. Reynold’s interpreta-
tions lead him to voice his own text.


Dalton has studied how two English schools changed their geography curricu-
ulum and made other innovations, exploring concerns of the geographers, the
teachers, and the institutions. He discusses the educational assumptions held,
the conflicts that arose, and the character of curriculum implementation as
negotiation.