

Perspectives and Imperatives

THE SOCIAL-RECONSTRUCTIVE WEDGE: A MODEL FOR RESTRUCTURING CURRICULUM

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In the rubric of restructuring our educational system, discussions on teacher empowerment, site-based management, outcomes-based education, teacher-teaming, cooperative learning, heterogeneity, essential schools, and parent-as-teacher models abound. Unfortunately, we have given only cursory attention to developing curriculum models for these changes. Curriculum is often an afterthought related to these issues, not a prime mover for their inception.

Historically, we have perceived curriculum revisions as an effect, not a cause, of change in educational institutions. Many recently revised curriculums have holistic, interrelated frameworks developed (albeit subtly) to satisfy corporate, legislative, and administrative demands. Although these frameworks, supported with time-tested learning and psychological theory, may have a Deweyan, pragmatist construct (yes, the world is in a state of flux), and the delivery of such a curriculum is most effective when employing a constructivist underpinning, the implementation results are disappointing at best. The rationale for such curricular changes are painfully obvious: They have been legislated from a reactive state using economic analysis and corporate bellyaching¹—not from a proactive state using trend analysis, what we know about how people learn, and curriculum for the new millennium for a different society.²

Missing in these curriculum-revision, school-restructuring links is a curriculum paradigm that incorporates reflective intelligence while promoting social and utilitarian responsibilities. Curriculum observers, from theoretical and practical perspectives, agree that a discourse of simplicity is the most

¹Michael Apple, "The Politics of Common Sense. Schooling, Populism, and the New Right, in *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle*, ed. Henry A Giroux and Peter L. McLaren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 32-49.

²Connecticut Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, "Shaping the Revolution. Curriculum for the New Millennium," Position Paper No. 4 (Southport: Connecticut Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1988).

effective way of dealing with the exponential increase of information. How can we conduct this discourse without ignoring the myopic concerns of corporate, and therefore legislative, institutions over skill development?

The "social-reconstructive wedge" model addresses this seemingly paradoxical issue (see Figure 1). It treats the school as a social system where the constituents interact according to certain norms and behaviors. Thus, the curriculum theory used as the baseline for this model is society-centered, with strong considerations of the reformer who wishes to effect major changes in the social order by giving students the intellectual tools they need to solve social problems, and the futurist, who believes the school curriculums should have a futurist orientation, focusing on the developments likely to occur. Eisner and Vallance have determined that the social-reconstruction-relevance issue emphasizes societal needs over individual needs.³

The primary role of those in the educational arena is to relate to the larger society, with either an adaptive or a reformist stance. Because technology has transformed 20th-century society and has acted as a catalyst for all social, economic, political, ethical, and intellectual reformations, we cannot ignore its influence.⁴

The curriculum model described here consists of an integrated, operationally designed knowledge-skill base with correlates derived from language (cultural and social genre) and numeracy (natural and physical laws) experiences. Because technology has advanced to an age where communication is the mechanism that drives societies, technology links language and numeracy in the model. This link comes from applying the knowledge-expansion paradigm of content integration in concert with the acquisition of increased depth and complexity. In this framework, the individual's exploratory behavior ultimately determines society's reconstruction (as opposed to its mere reproduction, the result of hegemony and the deskilling of the teacher work force).⁵

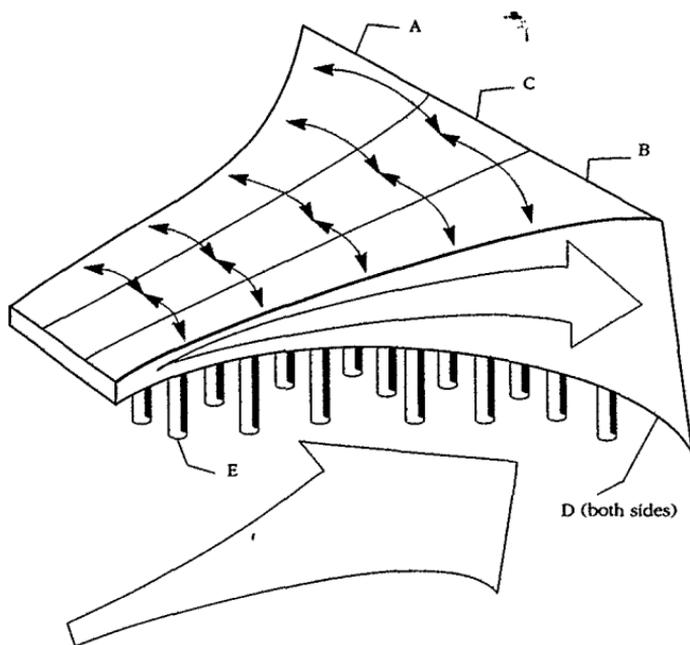
Learning occurs as the person engages in problem solving that transfers to a variety of subjects and situations. Knowing is an assimilation of experience and natural phenomena of the environment. Students begin their formal education with a language and communication knowledge base and a numeracy knowledge base from their environment. These structures form the foundation for expanded knowledge of natural and physical laws and for humanistic and social endeavors. As students acquire more knowledge and experience in their multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary constructs, they glean salient information from related, as well as from what appear to be

³Elliot W. Eisner and Elizabeth Vallance, ed., *Conflicting Conceptions of Curriculum* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1974).

⁴Allan A. Glatthorn, *Curriculum Leadership* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1987).

⁵Michael Apple and Susan Jungck, "You Don't Have to Be a Teacher to Teach This Unit": Teaching, Technology, and Control in the Classroom," *American Educational Research Journal* 27 (Summer 1990): 227-251.

Figure 1. The Social-Reconstructive Wedge



- A. Longitudinal acquisition of natural and physical laws and related environmental, experiential knowledge.
- B. Longitudinal acquisition of language and communication and related cultural, societal, and experiential knowledge.
- C. The technological strand focusing on blending the mutually exclusive characteristics of A and B.
- D. The utilitarian and social construct—why the process is taking place. These issues become increasingly layered as the individual progresses.
- E. Depth-of-knowledge (not breadth-of-knowledge) indicators. The acquisition of language and numeracy, technologically interwoven, forces an increase of knowledge, the depth and complexity of which should not fall outside Piaget's theoretical margins.

diverse, strands.⁶ (It is naive to think that demarcations among content is not an issue to be reckoned with.) Because Dewey considered scientific inquiry the best form of knowledge for society, once the individual has acquired the eclectic knowledge base, depth and complexity follow. The technological impetus relating Points A and B of Figure 1 with the acquisition of depth and complexity knowledge drives the model.

To move toward a theoretical construct, we must consider these points: Pragmatists construe knowledge as a process in which reality is constantly changing.⁷ Structural theorists focus on identifying elements in the curriculum and determining their relationships.⁸ Structural neopragmatism is based on change, process, relativity, intellectual growth, and social reconstruction as the result of critical thinking and exploratory behavior, necessary underpinnings for depth-of-knowledge acquisition within the parameters of language and natural phenomena, interwoven by technology.

The purpose of this model is to exhibit the curriculum ideology that should envelop the theoretical underpinnings driving restructuring efforts. As educators reconsider holistic education and the mechanism behind interactive and interrelated learning and (perhaps finally) break away from the thesis that reduces knowledge to a predetermined set of discrete objectives in a structured environment, schools will no longer merely reproduce society by maintaining its dominant components. This model demonstrates how technology may be the vehicle for emancipating knowledge from the language and numeracy genres, the foundations for all advanced thought.

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⁶Heidi Hayes Jacobs, ed., *Interdisciplinary Curriculum. Design and Implementation* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1989).

⁷Allan C. Ornstein and Francis P. Hunkins, *Curriculum. Foundations, Principles, and Issues* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1988).

⁸Dorothy Huenecke, "What Is Curriculum Theorizing? What Are Its Implications for Practice?" *Educational Leadership* 39 (January 1982): 290-294.

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