

# A Historical and Philosophical Study on the Nature of Curriculum Studies

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## Abstract

The fact that South Korean curriculum scholars formed many of their perspectives on curricular phenomena through the United States curriculum studies and literature cannot be repudiated. In order to analyze the influences of the United States curriculum studies in South Korea requires one who is able to combine the United States curriculum studies and South Korean curriculum studies with an extensive knowledge both of the literature and of history of each as well as the larger history of influences between these countries. No one is fully able to accomplish this task, and the extent of reading or knowledge it requires about both countries. However, this study is beginning of such a project that will hopefully grow through efforts of many scholars. As a prerequisite to doing this, at least in the process of doing so, this paper is an attempt to interpret a history of curriculum studies in the United States, to figure out the nature of curriculum studies in the United States, and eventually to provide insight to guide the curricular present and future. In short, this study is a preliminary study for pursuing further study of analyzing the influences of American curriculum studies into South Korea.

Keywords : curriculum studies, knowledge, society, learner

## 1. Introduction

The search for roots in many fields today discredits the long-held notion that the growth of knowledge always ferrets out inert ideas and preserves productive one. Even nature scientists revive documents previously believed to be archaic. Viewed with new perspectives, such documents often reveal method and substance that illuminate current problem.

Curriculum scholars have had similar experience. The search for origins of the curriculum thought has begun. Several contributions have appeared in the sixties and seventies that provide steps toward preventing ahistoricism[1]. In this process, some have begun to realize that while increased curriculum specialization magnified schooling, it clouded a holistic vision

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of childhood's curriculum to adulthood.

Such a vision is portrayed in novels, poetry, film, painting, music and the performing arts. It is also analyzed in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and history. These and other sources reflect an array of epistemological bases: intuition, empiricism, experience, revelation, reason, authority, and utility. By all means, the richness of perspectives that contributed to curricular insight before the advent of specialization needs to be revitalized. The variety of methodologies in such perspectives should not be ignored.

Speculative endeavor, though today in demise, ignited the contributions made by the recent ancestors of the curriculum scholars. Curriculum scholars rebel pressures to expunge its tendency to engage in speculation. It needs to resist the force to increase specialization that limits attention to schooling alone. Therefore curriculum scholars advance the emergent tendency to perceive curriculum broadly, as a function of culture, not merely of schooling.

As a prerequisite to doing this, at least in the process of doing so, curriculum scholars need to expose the limits and impositions of the epistemological assumptions that undergird the several social and behavioral science that direct the course of educational inquiry today. Joshep Schwab[2] called for a moratorium on the prostitution of educators after academic respectability, that is, to blind adherence to values implicit in dominant social science methodology. William Pinar[3] also challenged educational researchers to develop research methodologies that are based on epistemological assumptions worthy of emulation by social scientists themselves.

Applied to curriculum inquiry, the above necessitates the orchestration of many methodologies. Relevant modes of inquiry and expression would not be wholly unlike the rich precedent of illumination of human situations that is available in the literature of philosophy, the humanities, the arts, and religion, as well as the social and natural science.

Thus, this study is an attempt to overcome the dominant perspective in curriculum studies, to provide insight to guide the curricular present and future, to figure out the nature of curriculum studies in United States, and eventually to pursue further study of analyzing the influences of American curriculum studies into South Korea.

## **2. Research Methodologies**

As Edmond Short[4] notes, "curriculum inquiry involves identifying some curriculum questions that are amenable to inquiry, knowing what form of inquiry to use in attempting to answer those particular questions, and carrying out the appropriate processes of inquiry in

order to obtain those answers". In this study I transform a Herbart Spencer's question into the following research question to characterize the nature of American curriculum thought: what is worth knowing for a curriculum history. This question could be assisted by philosophical inquiry as well as historical inquiry

## **2.1 Philosophical inquiry**

The general method of philosophy is essentially that of dialectic which is a process of conceptual examination by raising questions, proposing answers, and developing implications of those answers in continuing cycles. In more detail, philosophical inquiry of curriculum "seeks to understand the structures of concepts, knowledge and disciplines, and identifies their presuppositions, implications, gaps, and assess their validity or strength" [5].

In this study the epistemology of curriculum thought in United States will be examined by philosophical inquiry. Careful attention will be focused on the investigation of the underlying assumptions, its metaphorical usage, and the structural changes in the interpretation of learner, society, and subject matter, which are key sources for curriculum thought. As Hilda Taba[6] indicated, an emphasis on a single basis, such as the knowledge, the needs of society, or the needs of the learner, has produced an inevitable "versus thinking" with forming diverse schools of curriculum thought in a history of American curriculum.

## **2.2 Historical inquiry**

The significance of historical study for curriculum scholars lies in the possibility which offers for the shaping of large perspectives and for making some sense of the inchoate present which they move[7]. Thus, to engage in historical inquiry is to seek out organizing principles and ideas to pattern the particularities that compose experience as it widens to include the past.

Asking questions about continuities, line of development, relationships among ideas and events, facts and values, and economic and social changes, the curriculum scholars are in a position to pursue meanings, if not answers. They are in a position to orient themselves in the continuous universe extending far beyond their personal plight. They are also in a position to appropriate the past by making it part of their own life situation, the situations in which their choices are to be made.

In order to provide insight to guide the curricular present and future, firstly curricular insight before the advent of specialization will be examined as a background for legitimization

of curriculum as an area of study and then this study will interpret and discuss salient contributions in curriculum thought from 1900s to 2000s. In this study I locate the birth of curriculum as a field of study in 1893 with the publication of Report of the committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies as Herbert Kliebard[8] chooses the dates as beginning points for the curriculum fields.

### **3. Characters in Curriculum Studies**

It was becoming problematic as to whether the curriculum that had seemed to serve so successfully in the 19th century would be suitable for the new population of students then marching through the schoolhouse doors. In the older curriculum, it was deemed necessary to ensure the legitimacy of existing educational purposes and contents, and to see curriculum and instruction as mental disciplines conveyed through faculty psychology[9], wherein the mind was seen as made up of faculties (e.g. reason, intuition) to be improved by exercise.

The criticisms of these theories emerged in earnest in the United States in the early twentieth century. More specifically, alternatives to mental discipline were found in the theory and practice of Herbartians, i.e., Frank and Charles McMurry, and in the measurement and behaviorism of William James and Edward L. Thorndike. Both alternatives were fueled by public sentiments. In addition, Franklin Bobbitt and W. W. Charters derived their validity from the growing faith in science and technology, and John Dewey's pragmatism sprang from the faith in individualism, democracy, and reflective science and ethics[10]. Virtually these curriculum professoriate in its formative year opened new horizons of curriculum studies.

In this period there was little discussion of methodology of designing curricula but more clarity about the elements; learner, society, and subject matter, which may constitute a design. In this period there was little agreement among curricularists with respect to the precise meaning of such terms, even though the Twenty-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education was produced to make visible a composite statement by curricularists at that time. As Decker Walker[11] indicated, however, the Twenty-sixth Yearbook exemplified and solidified tendencies toward the "versus thinking", and the clash among "versus thinking" marked the beginning of a realignment of the forces that were to battle for control of the American curriculum. The followings attempt to clarify the distinctions among the terms; knowledge, learner, and society, and in so doing provides us with some idea of the scope and nature of curriculum studies at that time as well as contemporary discourses of reconceptualization.

### 3.1 The philosophical premises for who emphasizes the knowledge

It was clear that throughout most of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, the predominant curriculum theories were built around the notion of habits to be cultivated. These came to be known as mental disciplines. Concerned with developing powers of the mind through exercises largely drawn from liberal arts that stood the test of time, proponents of this view can be fairly labeled "*intellectual traditionalists*"[12] or "*humanist*"[8].

An interestingly strange amalgam emerged in the early 1900's. It was the joining of this classical tradition with elements of a branch of psychology known as faculty psychology. Briefly, faculty psychologists linked the mind into muscles that could be developed with practice in subjects of the classical curriculum. The basic assumption of this scheme is that human beings have something that makes them different from all other animals. This is the ability to reason. This rationality, then, is human's essence as Aristotle tells us, in fact, that man is a rational animal. This is not to say that all human beings are the same. This view recognizes that there are differences. These differences are what are called accidental qualities. Some have one set of talents; others have a quality that is intrinsically human, that characterizes their humanity. This is their ability to deliberate, meditate, speculate; in short to reason. This is what man can do that no other animal can do. Therefore, it is the nature of human nature to be rational.

Obviously, education exists to develop human, not as mere matter, but as human. We as human beings bring schools into existence to do the job of educating. If the role of the school is to develop human as human, and if it is the nature of human to be rational, then it follows that it is the role of the school to develop human's rationality. That is what schools are uniquely equipped to do; they are the sole institution in society with that charges. Whatever to other needs human has will be met through other institutions. Schools will develop human's ability to reason and through reason, he or she will come to know.

Since human nature is everywhere the same, education will everywhere be the same[13]. The mind of the learner will be developed by immersion in those ordered subjects or disciplines that represent true knowledge. The ordered disciplines are those which represent the orderliness in the universe. Such immersion will develop the natural powers that are potential in human nature. What subjects do this? This has varied, although the strictest of the view will still insist that it means the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music). On this basis, whatever did not fit the need of developing reason had no business being retained in the curriculum. The content of the liberal arts could

best be studies in the “*Great books*”[13], which represents the spiritual and physical permanencies of the world.

The point of this liberal education is not to teach humans to make a living, but rather to teach them to live. Learning to live means developing their actuality; leading them from potentiality to what they are to become. In order to do this the school must create the type of environment which will develop their intellect. The intellect is developed by acquaintance with true knowledge. Since this is provided for through the great classics, this view eschew contemporary or real-life situation.

The role of the teacher is exemplified by the role which Socrates played in Meno. This makes the role of the teacher central in importance. This does not mean that the teacher is a mere conveyor of data and facts. But through his questioning, and also through his lectures, the teacher helps children to come to adjust to eternal truths. Learning is by instruction but it leads to self-learning as the mind is developed.

### **3.2 The philosophical premises for who emphasizes the learner**

Progressivism has generally been associated with John Dewey and pragmatism. The theory has its inception shortly before the turn of the twentieth century. It enjoyed expression in the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago, which was founded in 1896. During the period of Dewey’s progressive movement, which was also known as experimentalism, another brand of progressivism enjoyed some brief attention, too. This was the romantic naturalistic approach which would most likely trace its origin back to Rousseau, rather than to Dewey. Frequently, this distinction is not made, and all progressivism is regarded as a single movement. The fact that Dewey himself recognized the distinction is evidenced by his attack on the later progressivism, the romantic movement of the twenties and thirties, in his little volume, *Experience and Education* (1938). This book, along with *Democracy and Education* (1916), gives us a clear picture of one branch of progressivism[12].

One departure from the traditional position to be found in progressivism is the view that the pupil is active rather than passive. The progressive educational theorists took their views of the learner and learning from the behavior scientists. Progressive thinkers embraced the newer concepts that have replaced the older faculty psychology. One result of this has been the progressive emphasis on educating the whole child. New movements in psychology picture the child as an organism and reject the notions of mind isolated from physical existence.

Consequently, to the progressive, rather than the mind being an entity which can be trained

in isolation, mind became simply a summation symbol for particular ways of behaving. Education then became the alteration of whole behavior patterns. This places curriculum squarely in the center of experience, rather than isolating it as happens in other theories. They emphasize educating the whole child because that is the only kind who ever shows up in his or her school. Hence, the focus, for them, is on the learner rather than solely on a particular body of content to be mastered.

Since the child is an active learner, learning takes place the way any learning takes place. Child has to be actively involved in the learning process. This means that what is to be learned is not simply imposed from above, rather the pupil is involved at the appropriate level in selection of means and ends. Pupil's interests and needs are central for the curriculum[14]. This does not mean that the curriculum and instruction consist of following every immediate childish whim. Dewey[14] protested vehemently against catering to student caprice:

some teachers seem to be afraid even to make suggestions to the members of a group...I have heard of cases in which children are surrounded with objects and materials and then left entirely to themselves, the teacher being loath to suggest even what might be done with the material lest freedom be impinged. Why, then, supply materials?.

The teacher does not abdicate. But the teacher helps to control the environment and guide the child rather than simply imposing sets of fixed notions. The progressive also viewed knowledge as a dynamic process rather than something inert which one possessed. This also had its influence on what went on in the classroom. Rather than viewing knowledge as a completed body of facts or truths which human had discovered, the progressive, drawing on the pragmatic views, regarded knowledge as a way of re-ordering experience. Since knowledge is viewed in this way, coming to know, or learning, is then regarded as, in Dewey's[15] terms, the "reconstruction of experience". This re-ordering of experiences into new experiences is what constitutes the aim of education.

However to the romantic naturalists the child was viewed sentimentally as being a naturally developing or unfolding individual whose every whim must be met. Hence, there was a laissez-faire attitude in which the teacher simply followed the lead of the child and the program moved from whim to whim. Relevance simply came to mean the child's taste. In reaction to the highly controlled atmosphere of the traditional classroom, all controls were eliminated. In the extreme this view led to a conception of the child-centered curriculum with its concern for creative self-expression, individuality, activity, freedom from imposition, and growth from within. This idea was to move the child into the center of the curriculum and to

allow him or her freedom to develop as a unique personality[16].

### **3.3 The philosophical premises for who emphasizes the society**

The idea that education is a social process, the primary and effective instrument of social reconstruction, came with the work and writings of Dewey[14][15]. The main assumption of this view was that the school is not merely a residual institution to maintain things as they are; education has a creative function to play in the forming of individuals and through them in the forming of the culture. Dewey consistently depicted the function of the school in both psychological and social terms in *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897). In subsequent development one fork of this dual orientation of Dewey on the function of education matured into an elaboration of the social responsibilities of the school (i.e., George Counts, Harold Rugg, and Theodore Brameld), while the other centered more emphatically on individual development as mentioned above.

Thus, there are points on which the "social meliorist", as Kliebard's[8] term, does not agree with the child-centered orientation, and similarly, there are parts of the social meliorist position that the child-centered finds intolerable. The arguments about the relative importance between the social orientation and child-centered orientation were enough to split the progressive movement into two camps[8][12].

Social meliorists urge that some type of social order is always maintained, an order which is not precisely and exactly like the old order, and this is accomplished through indoctrination. Therefore, there is no question of whether or not such an activity should be engaged in. For them the real questions with which the curricularists need to be concerned are: to what extent do we indoctrinate, and what direction is such indoctrination to take?

George S. Counts, responding to these questions in the 1930s, concluded that education was in the grips of a conservative minority which was using the institution to serve its own ends and conserve its privileged position. In a book entitled *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?*, Counts[17] urged an affirmative answer to his own question. He suggested that teachers should unite and emancipate the schools from the controls of conservative forces. They would accomplish this by facing social issues squarely and providing an education that was more democratic in that it would serve the interests of the masses.

The social order which Counts recommended was clearly laid out. It was here that he departed from the progressives. Although he was himself counted a progressivism and approved of much of the progressive educational theory, he felt that the movement had failed.

The failure lay in the progressive's failure to specify the goals toward which effort was to be directed. The progressive focused on ends-in-view which themselves became means to further ends, but the emphasis Counts felt was on means. In social theory, progressives remained agnostics when the crises of the times called for commitment. They were willing to see a new social order built through education. But they would not establish what kind of new order was to be built.

At the base of this view are three central themes. The first is that society is unhealthy and threatening to individual survival. The second is that something can be done to prevent the self-destruction of society. The Third is that education is the mena to that end[18]. They believed that our society is experiencing a major dislocation, a dislocation of our institutions, habits, practices, and attitudes. In this crisis it becomes the role of education to apply the needed therapy. The dislocation is of such proportions that unless the remedies begin to be applied immediately and forcefully, they may be little hope for the recovery of our sick society.

It must be through education that the crises are overcome. This can be accomplished only by rebuilding in new directions toward future goals and purposes. If the culture is not renewed and reshaped through education, then the culture is doomed. In *A Philosophic Approach to Communism*, Theodore Brameld[19] devotes to an outline of the type of social order that is to be established. He lays out in some detail the economy to be established, the political system, the humane order, and the world order.

This represents one of the areas which the progressive finds intolerable. It is not that progressives oppose such a social order as that laid out by Brameld. Many feel personally committed to just such an order. What they find reprehensive is that what Brameld offers with one hand, he takes away with the other. He promises a social order that is genuinely democratic. To the progressive this means one in which goals and values are not predetermined. Yet Kilpatrick[20] finds that Brameld has already made the whole decisions for them; "He spelled out precisely what we must be committed to without any room for our sharing in the shaping of these ends and goals".

This is indeed a strange democracy, according to the progressive. Learning, in this scheme, is regarded as goal-seeking. The goals must be transformative, not transmissive. Learning will be directed at commitment to a world order, the nature of which was described briefly by Brameld. The other facet of direction of learning will be social self-realization. Social self-realization will be accomplished through making every child from their earliest years feel that they are helping to create their school and society. They will also be involved in

purposed, socially useful community enterprises. Learning shall come largely through the consideration of problems. These problems are those created by the interruption in satisfying specifiable wants. Such problems will, of course, be integral with cultural and intercultural purposes. The learner will learn to rely on evidence in arriving at the solutions to problems.

Although the connection between the discourses of meta-level in curriculum studies as an informal field of inquiry and its influence on curriculum studies to 1920s was not entirely clear, however it is safe to contend that these early curriculum theorists ponder deeply the philosophical, psychological and social issues related to curriculum. Thomas Hopkins[21] indicates these theoretical trends in curriculum studies at that time: "all books written up to 1928 were too long on theory and too short on its application in practice".

#### **4. Conclusion**

The nature of curriculum studies is closely related to the issue of how to limit the meaning of curriculum. If the term curriculum is extended to whole of life, i.e., *Currere*[3] or the lived experience of curriculum, rather than to schooling, the nature of curriculum studies takes the tendency of theoretical inquiry. On the other hand, if the concept of curriculum is limited to schooling, the practical nature of curriculum studies strongly emerges.

Since 1960s in the United States the debate on the nature of curriculum studies continued between those who continue to work within the parameter of curriculum development and those who adopt new perspectives through participation in other academic disciplines, and the field of curriculum studies in the United States is in struggle.

All disciplines have universality and particularity, curriculum studies is no exception. However, curriculum studies in South Korea had a strong tendency to emphasize the nature of universality and curriculum scholars somewhat regarded the United States curriculum ideas and orientations as the universal. Thus, many Korean curriculum scholars just attempted to introduce U.S. curriculum studies uncritically. It cannot be denied that U.S. curriculum studies have exerted a huge impact on forming diverse perspectives on South Korean curriculum thought. However U.S. curriculum studies also have evolved within particular social contexts.

We have different educational situations. Curriculum scholars in South Korea still develop school curricula. Thus, these considerations must continue to influence our work if we hope to continue to influence educational institutions and those within them. When we abandon that purpose, when we serve our ties to our traditions and cease attempts to advance thinking relevant to our field's fundamental questions, we will forfeit all hope of serving educators and

students in schools and other educational settings. If that happens, we will be left serving only ourselves. And if we cannot be of general service to those who work to educate others within formal, institutional settings, then the renewal of our field is unlikely. And if we cannot provide such service in intellectually complex and varied forms representing multiple frames of reference, then renewal of our field is simply unimportant.

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