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On matters that matter in the curriculum studies: an interview with Ian Westbury

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ABSTRACT

This semi-structured interview is an attempt to examine how an experienced scholar (Ian Westbury) of curriculum might interpret both recent developments and the current atmosphere of curriculum by paying attention to the history that has taken it to the present. During a career that spans more than five decades, Ian Westbury has established himself as an important figure in the area of curriculum and its theory. Specifically, he focused on the German tradition of *Didaktik* as reflective teaching. He also examined Schwab's deliberative approach to curriculum thinking and theory. In this interview, Westbury covers a wide array of topics and issues as they relate to curriculum, its theory and history. He explains, from his perspective, how the field was conceptualized in its formative years and what happened thereafter. He argues that Schwab's effect on the field has not widely penetrated curriculum studies. In addition, he also touches on how he became involved in the *Didaktik* tradition and the importance of assessment in the field.



KEYWORDS

Curriculum; curriculum theory; deliberative tradition; Didaktik; Schwab

I met Emeritus Professor Ian Westbury during the summer of 2017. A mutual acquaintance, upon reading some of my writing and judging it might be of interest to Professor Westbury, forwarded it to him. When we met, it did not take me a long time to realize that I was interacting with a walking encyclopaedia on curriculum and its theory. It occurred to me back then that a formal interview with this seasoned curriculum scholar would be beneficial to the field and its students. I readily took the responsibility for a formal interview and informed Westbury of my desire to realize such a possibility. To my luck, my invitation appealed to him.

I had one fundamental rationale for the interview during the planning phase. It was, and still is, the belief that recently there has been less interest in the core issues of the field of curriculum. This assertion, of course, does not mean to claim that recent interests and efforts in the field are of less value in terms of substance or quality; rather, it is to point to a need to revitalize some of the quintessential aspects of the field. In short, my determination has been to talk about matters that, I believe, matter in the field of curriculum in the form of a small-scale oral history (see e.g. Miller, King, Mark, & Caracelli, 2016) for hopefully sparking scholarly exchanges on these matters.

I must remark that literature in which scholars interviewed figures in their fields to learn from them influenced the planning phases of this study, as well as the writing process. For example, Cardellini (2013) interviewed Peter J. Fensham, a prominent science educator, to

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*The first footnote (italicized) is an explanation by me whereas the rest of the footnotes are provided by Dr. Westbury and the I in them is he.

present, in general, Fensham's views of what he calls 'science for all'. Similarly, Miller et al. (2016) conducted an oral history study with Robert E. Stake, a pioneer name in curriculum evaluation, where he declares that his recent interest is to inform evaluators on challenges that the field has faced since its earlier days. In the field of curriculum specifically, Fishbein and Tyler (1973), Ryan, Johnson, Newman and Tyler (1977), Nowakowski (2011/1981), Mickler (1986), Madaus and Stufflebeam (1989), Tyler and Hiatt (1994) and Horowitz (1995) have all interviewed Ralph W. Tyler. Each one of these interviews focused on a different theme. In addition, a collection of 18 personal essays by established scholars under the title *Leaders in Curriculum Studies* also inspired the effort at hand, especially in terms of recording the individual experiences of scholars in the field (Short & Waks, 2009). In general, this latter line of studies are important historical records from which contemporary as well as future curricularists might benefit. My hope is that the present effort builds on these studies.

During the planning phase of the interview, I formulated a framework¹ for the interview process from which I derived a set of questions to ask Westbury. After that, I presented the set to him so that he would have an initial look prior to the actual interview. I have to admit, however, that, during the interview, the flow turned out to be richer than I expected. Therefore, I had to rearrange my questions, asking some unplanned ones in the direction that the interview took to elicit rich answers from the interviewee. Thus, should I be asked what type of interview this has been, I must say that it is a semi-structured one.

What followed in the process was transcribing the audio-recorded interview. I transcribed the audio file twice to ensure that the transcription would not miss any important details. Then, Westbury thoroughly read the transcription to correct some parts that might have passed my scrutiny due to the fact that I was unfamiliar with his Australian accent while also adding some crucial information to the initial transcription. In doing so, he included a couple of citations to the parts he added, which, I believe, can help readers who might seek more information or context on what Westbury discusses. As a result of this process, we arrived at the final version of the interview. I organized the interview into five subsections to ensure that reading was thematic and easy to follow. Before moving to the main reading, let me do the honour of presenting my interviewee.

Westbury's biography as a professor of curriculum has, expectedly, spanned a long period of time and different continents. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Latin and History in 1959 from the University of Melbourne, Australia. In 1968, he completed his PhD at the University of Alberta, Canada. Åbo Akademi (Turku, Finland) awarded him an honorary degree (Pe.D., h. c.) in 2005. During his career, he served as a secondary teacher (1961–64, Australia), lecturer and assistant professor (1966–68, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and 1968–73, University of Chicago) and associate professor and professor (1973–2008, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). He has published extensively on curriculum, curriculum theory, mathematics education, science education, curriculum and teacher education from international perspectives, as well as on Schwab and the deliberative tradition of curriculum making. He served as the vice-president of Division B (Curriculum Studies) of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) between 1985 and 1987. In addition, for his academic efforts, Division B of AERA rewarded him with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003. Finally, from 1975 to 2009, Westbury served as an associate and later general editor of the *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, a pivotal publication in the field. His long involvement with this journal, I believe, gives Westbury a vantage point to legitimately talk about the field. Obviously, there is more to say about Westbury and his achievements. However, as my emphasis in this interview is on the discussion of important curricular matters rather than providing a personal history of Westbury, what I have said thus far should suffice. Now, without further ado, I present the interview.

1. The crisis in the curriculum field: a historical examination

M. Emir Ruzgar (R): Several scholars of curriculum have recently talked about a crisis in the field (Garcia–Huidobro, 2017; Wraga & Hlebowitsh, 2003; Wyse, Hayward, & Pandya, 2016; Young, 2013), what is, in your opinion, the nature of this crisis and what do you think about it?

Ian Westbury (W): I think it has to be understood historically. The American curriculum field emerged in the 1930s as part of the task of managing the transition of the American secondary school from an elite preparatory school to a mass terminal secondary school (i.e. most of the entering class were expected to graduate) as well as managing the continuing movement to ‘progressivism’ in the elementary school.² By the end of the war and beginning of the 1950s, the tasks around the high school changed because the school was changing. Instead of being a mass terminal school, the high school had become a mass preparatory (for college) school as well as continuing its mass terminal function.³ The energy (and the questions) shifted to the transformation of the curriculum from a preparation for ‘life’ to a preparation for college, particularly for programmes in the ‘new’ engineering and science.

In other words, the curricular question of that day became what a pre-university programme in science and math, and later the social sciences, should look like. Neither the schools nor the curriculum field were ready for that because that had not been their function. And in the academic areas, the attention moved towards scientists who could address the problems of the ‘new’ sciences. The sciences and engineering had been transformed during the 1930s and 1940s, and as a consequence, college curricula in the sciences and engineering were changing in the 1950s and 1960s.

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) was initially important in this project because we were one of the first to face the transition in the College of Engineering from a school for teaching engineering as ‘mechanic arts’ to ‘engineering science’, particularly in electrical engineering. To achieve the curricular transformation this required, students needed to complete at least a pre-calculus course in school so that they could do core calculus courses in their first year and then post-calculus in their second and third years. To prepare them for doing a pre-calculus course in high school a complete revision of the four-year high school math curriculum was required. UIUC established the University of Illinois Committee on School Mathematics (UICSM) in 1951 to undertake this transformation in schools in Illinois. This work was the precursor to the later work that the National Science Foundation (NSF) sponsored creating the alphabet soup of ‘modern’ science curricula, i.e. PSSC, BSCS, ChemStudy, etc.

With that movement of curriculum leadership (and school function of curriculum leadership) away from the issues of the 1930s to the issues of 1950s and 1960s, the ‘traditional’ curriculum field of the 1930s and 1940s lost its core reason for being. But the field was both dying *and* renewing itself. Thus, by the late 1960s, there was a group of people who were at a pre-retirement phase of their careers; and a group of younger people came to the positions in curriculum that were vacated as the older people retired. In the United States, many of these younger people were heavily involved in the anti-Vietnam protest movements of the 1960s with its links to both the radical left, as well as the last era of the civil rights movement. One outcome was the reflection of the left-leaning anti-Vietnam and Civil Rights movements in people like Mike Apple, Henry Giroux and later Bill Ayers in Chicago—but also, I think, the early Bill Pinar. And then later, in the 1970s, curriculum theory was taken over by the ‘progressive’ socio-cultural movements of the 1970s, feminism, race, later LGBT, etc. Accompanying all this was a movement towards seeing curriculum theory as cultural studies, led in the first instance by people like Madeleine Grumet, Bill Pinar, Tom Popkewitz and Henry Giroux.

These movements were to have a market among undergraduates and graduates that old-style curriculum, conceptual-empirical research seeking an understanding of schools and schooling, and/or the practical never had. And it was certainly appropriate to make teacher education students aware of these neo-Marxist and neo-Foucauldian cultural studies. But it sat more naturally in social and cultural foundations rather than Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) departments with their strong commitments to practice. And, inasmuch as it was not practically programmatic, resource providers had little interest in this agenda as part of teacher education. At the same time, this agenda diverted the curriculum field's attention away from (1) the 'modern' issues facing schools, e.g. outcomes inequity in American schooling, the 'urban' problem, technology, STEM, evaluation and institutional accountability that were at different times to preoccupy policy-makers, (2) the curriculum and teaching *research* of the kind being done by Walter Doyle, Becky Barr and Robert Dreeben, Ulf Lundgren, John Meyer or Lee Shulman and his protégés like Pamela Grossman, Sam Wineberg, etc. One outcome was a division between teacher education and curriculum studies (as seen in AERA) as many middle-of-the-road, research-oriented curriculum people moved to teacher education where they maintained a link with the practical work of school improvement.

R: How does this crisis relate to the one Schwab (1969a) defined? Are they the same?

W: It is the same crisis that Schwab was talking about 50 years ago. I went to a meeting in Washington in 1967 (I think) in which the question was 'What is to become of curriculum and curriculum theory?' Schwab was there along with people like Arno Bellack and Harry Passow (Teachers College), Elizabeth Maccia (from Ohio State⁴), Mauritz Johnson (SUNY Albany), George Beauchamp (from Northwestern⁵), all of whom had ideas about theorizing in curriculum.

I was working then at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) when Ontario was moving towards the combination of mass terminal and mass college preparatory secondary education and when the country was dealing with the ferment being created by Quebec's Francophone separatism. I was beginning to teach curriculum and could not make sense of the so-called 'field' as it might apply to students and programmes in Canada. In Toronto, we were watching Detroit burn and we had our teach-ins and protests about Vietnam, but Black Rage and 'Vietnam' and all it stood for were American problems, not ours! (And, as a late-20s Australian naval reservist in Canada, I was not at risk of being drafted to be sent anywhere.) Moreover, curricula and school organization (high school tracking, etc.) were provincial rather than local matters.

In other words, the traditional textbooks in curriculum⁶ did not connect with anything that was in our air. The best I could see as the grist for teaching 'curriculum' was a kind of 'general method'—teaching to school personnel about emergent developments that did not fit into a subject methods framework (like the shift to multiple-choice assessment that was then taking place in Ontario high schools—and teachers did not believe in ideas like structures of the disciplines and 'inquiry'; immersion schools to teach French, etc.).

And what was 'research' in curriculum studies? Was it (as it seemed) applied educational psychology? At OISE, I had become involved in the analysis of a survey project that had been undertaken by a teacher in a private school investigating—and hopefully changing—Canadian secondary-school teaching of 'Canada'.⁷ But was this curriculum research as distinct from research on the curriculum, and was there a difference?

And, finally, what was curriculum theory? The Tyler Rationale was there as something that could be taught as a doctrine, but it made no sense taught that way—as I was to see later when I participated in a month-long seminar with Ralph Tyler. He did not attempt to 'teach' us: the energy came from the audience. Tyler sometimes responded to questions or comments anecdotally, sometimes in terms of aphorisms or statements of 'rules' framed to the question he was addressing. The Rationale was a set of notes to remind students of the class.

For me, work in 'curriculum theory' asked how a curricularist thought (and should think) about the subject and the field—by analogy with the 'theory of history' where we had thought about

such notions as Dilthey's *Verstehen* or Michael Scriven's or William Dray's work on *historical explanation*.⁸ But it was also clear that it meant different things to different people. I think that for many, including Arno Bellack⁹ and Elliott Eisner, theory meant a platform or an ideology (like progressivism or 'play-way'). For others, it meant simply a research-based view of the field that went beyond a 'Do this! Do that!'—if only in terms of a consideration of 'why?', as seen in Herb Kliebard's *The Struggle for the American curriculum* or Ivor Goodson's *School subjects and curriculum change*.¹⁰ For others, it meant a curriculum research that contributed to some kind of direct understanding of the phenomena of curriculum and instruction, as illustrated in *The Language of the Classroom*¹¹ or Bill Reid and Decker Walker's compilation, *Case Studies in Curriculum Change*.¹² None of this was clear at the conference where there was an enormous amount of conversation at cross purposes.

At the conclusion of the conference, Schwab told me that he had 'solved the problem' of the conference—a foreshadowing of *The practical 1* paper,¹³ and in what he did there reinforced my sense of the meaning of curriculum theory.

- R:** To conceptualize these issues better, maybe it would be helpful to have a closer look at the history of the field. What do you think about the formative years of the field?
- W:** Philip Jackson once talked about three ways of conceptualizing the teaching of 'curriculum' that can be ideal-typed in terms of places/institutions. '*Teachers College* (TC)' was characterized by large lecture classes with 50 or 100 students. The task of the lecturers was to communicate the big ideas of the day, whether historical, socio-economic or 'philosophical'. At '*Chicago*', there were small classes and not a large number of students; curriculum was seen as research-based (in terms of school surveys, the Eight Year Study, etc.). There, the field was framed evaluation- and/or measurement-based (Tyler himself was essentially a measurement person. He was to play a major role in initiating NAEP—the National Assessment of Educational Progress). Jackson centred his third school/tradition on '*Hershey, Pennsylvania*'. The question there reflected Count's '*Dare the schools build a new social order*',¹⁴ a tract that had emerged from the depression as a kind of visionary socialism/utopianism tinged with a romantic interest in the Soviet Union. Needless to say, these schools, with the exception of '*Chicago*' tended to embrace a kind of new-order educational sweetness and light. And all of them were different from the 'practical' curriculum-making taught in many places by retired superintendents or methods people who wanted to think more broadly. These are Pinar's 'traditionalists', those who maintain the 'old' ideologies and understandings of schools; typically, they were people who had come out of schools where they had worked as principals and teachers. The meeting in Washington was about a 'new theory' and/or a 'new platform', so it was tinged with the TC big-think starting point.

That kind of structure still exists with the reconceptualists taking on the mantle of Jackson's *Hershey, PA* and the field's neo-Marxists taking much of the style of TC.¹⁵ In the case of the reconceptualists, the 'theory' task of the DC meeting was given to cultural studies—and several of the leading early exponents ended up in cultural studies. The Chicago tradition—the group that became what Pinar terms 'conceptual empiricists'—was picked up by younger scholars like Decker Walker from Stanford, Walt Doyle from Arizona, me and some other people who either went into evaluation, teacher education, etc. (The problem for me was formulating my ambition around how to conceive of research in Schwab's practical, and it was some time before I developed the idea that we had to understand how schools work to think about affecting them¹⁶).

But by then Pinar was sweeping us away with his vision of curriculum as a form of cultural studies rather than a social science whereas the conceptual-empiricists were trying to give the enhancement of schooling a research base. But I still did not have a teaching agenda (I spent a lot of time looking at how fields like epidemiology and public health went about characterizing and identifying their issues of public health. I also looked closely at medical geography). But the core problem is that we, conceptual empiricists, never secured a clear following

because in part our institutional home was Chicago and the university closed its Department of Education.

2. Schwab as a curriculum scholar and the deliberative approach to curriculum

- R:** You mentioned your agenda of finding a research base in Schwab's 'practical'. Would you please give us insights on Schwab's personal and intellectual sides?
- W:** Schwab was a brilliant teacher of undergraduates. He was the kind of person who would arouse intense loyalty and commitment among students who understood what he was doing. As a teacher he was formed in the University of Chicago's College, an institution that in the 1940s enrolled students from grades 11 to 13 in an experiment to reconceive the structures of American education.

The College was led intellectually in the 1940s by a philosopher, Richard McKeon, whom Schwab once claimed was 'the greatest mind of 20th century'. McKeon was a very smart, immensely learned classicist and philosopher. Dewey had been on his doctoral committee. He made his reputation at Columbia University as one of the first professors of Western medieval philosophy in the United States. He edited the standard American collected works of Aristotle. But, most significant for our purposes, was his involvement with the general education movement at Columbia and his thinking about liberal education.

McKeon had a plan for a modern liberal arts curriculum that had an interpretation of Aristotle at its base: its structures were built around humankind's treatment of perennial problems in the sciences, social sciences and humanities along with contemporary operationalization of the ancient notions of 'liberal arts'. He developed a largely fixed curriculum across the four undergraduate years in which all the courses were animated by the same working ideas.¹⁷ The programme worked for a while but when the pre-war faculty came back home after the war and discovered what had been done to the curriculum in the sciences, history and all the rest, they blew it up.

At that point Schwab, who had led the effort in biology as chair of the natural sciences sequence, was rescued by Ralph Tyler who was then the chair of the Department of Education and knew him in his capacity as the University Examiner. Schwab moved to the Department of Education as a professor in the philosophy of education as well as a professor of natural sciences in the College. However, his heart and his thinking remained in the work of the College. Twenty or so years later he updated his vision of the College and of undergraduate education in his book *College Curriculum and Student Protest* (1969b).

Schwab's thinking about education was derived from his experience in the College, including the notion of the 'practical'. Indeed, the concept of the curriculum as 'practical' was part of the vision in *College Curriculum and Student Protest*. And the 'practical', *doing* as distinct from *knowing*, had defined the creation and teaching of the College curriculum. He had carried the same orientation to his work with the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS). It was this insight that he was to work with again in the aftermath of the Washington meeting as he responded to the discussion there with the first 'practical' paper (The first 'practical' paper was written immediately after he had completed *College Curriculum and Student Protest*.) As readers try to map his practical concern and how that would play out as a curriculum, the practical papers that have been widely cited in curriculum need to be read in the context of *College Curriculum and Student Protest* where the language he uses in practical papers is described more comprehensively.

- R:** Moving from personal to professional, I think that Schwab's impact on the field is undeniable.
- W:** I don't think it is undeniable! I think it faded away from curriculum studies as distinct from teacher education! The practical papers came when the energy was behind preaching change and protest—and black-and-white change and protest were captured by both the kind of analysis that Apple *et al.* and then the reconceptualists were doing. Schwab, on the other

hand, said things like curriculum has to accept institutions as they are and build on them. That became a text from the *Practical 1* paper that was to become anathema to the radicals. Finally, the word 'practical' itself became a problem; it was all too often taken to mean an advocacy for common-sensical, 'traditionalist' approaches to school improvement that had none of the complexity of Schwab's 'practical'.

I believe that the radicals drummed out Schwab's influence on the Anglo-American curriculum field. The people who went on (and go on) talking about Schwab were most often Chicago people who had had a direct contact with him, people like the late Elliot Eisner and Lee Shulman (Stanford), Michael Connelly (OISE/University of Toronto), Ilene Harris (University of Minnesota and University of Illinois at Chicago), Tom Roby (Chicago City Colleges), Bill Knitter (Concordia, Montreal) and Peter Pereira (DePaul). The one 'outsider' who bought into the Schwab model was Bill Reid (University of Birmingham, United Kingdom)¹⁸ and his student Wes Null,¹⁹ but Reid's contact came through Decker Walker (Eisner's student) and me. I think Schwab's 'practical' hasn't penetrated very far within curriculum outside the Chicago orbit, which (as I noted above) collapsed with the closing of Chicago's Department of Education.²⁰

- R:** How do you interpret his professional legacy in the field then, specifically his (re-?) conception of it? Or, if a new student of curriculum asks you why s/he should read Schwab, why and how would you convince the young scholar to read Schwab?
- W:** Because he is right in every sense. If the purpose of the field is not the enhancement of practice, then, what is it about? The question for curriculum studies as a field in the university is 'how do we improve practice'? What follows is another question: 'What is the nature and form of the intellectual/scholarly work around the curriculum seen as something to be 'improved'? 'What is curriculum research'? 'How do we conceive curriculum research as a field of doing (to maintain or to change) that can be taught'? Schooling is the focus as an agency. The improvement needs to centre around the institution of schooling, not around the idea of education. Schwab is the only person who leads you to that perspective.²¹

I discovered a brilliant essay by Dewey.²² It begins by pointing out that by the last decades of the 19th century there was a settlement between two types of people who 'owned' different domains in the schools: there were (1) ideologues who preached sweetness-and-light and had a monopoly over educational ideologies; and (2) 'administrators' who controlled the budgets and resources of the institutions of schooling and had a monopoly over the actual running of schools. He discusses all through the essay how that works itself out through the idea of the institution of the school. 'Reformers' somehow seek to improve schooling by changing the hearts and minds of teachers while not bothering with the hearts and minds of administrators, who continue to give teachers graded classes of 40-odd students to be taught in rooms with rows of desks and single textbooks. Inevitably the administrators and issues of control prevail over any aspiration of teachers for sweetness and light. Reconceptualism as an ideology and movement has the same problem.

Dewey defined the school improvement/delivery problem in this brilliant essay. Schwab, 60–70 years later, attempted to offer a serious solution to the intellectual roots of this century-old problem but he did not see the school as an institution as clearly as Dewey did. I think that Tyler was well aware of the problem; he was concerned with changing the institution of the school. You can't simply change the hearts and the minds of teachers. 'Improvement' is a whole process of institutional change.

- R:** Many scholars (such as you Westbury, 1994; also, Reid, 1999; Null, 2011; etc.) have followed Schwab's conception of the field and contributed to what is now known as the deliberative approach. Following the logic in the last question, say, a teacher or an administrator asks you to convince her/him on why s/he should design curricula deliberately, why and how would you convince the practitioner? In other words, what is the potential contribution of the deliberative tradition to the field of curriculum?

W: I should say that it was Bill Reid who coined the ‘deliberative curriculum theory’. We were searching for a label to create a focus for organizing or as a section of the chapter on curriculum theories in synoptic curriculum textbooks.

But your question implicates a view of schools and the malleability of ‘practitioners’. I worked for two years once as an evaluator of the research project in a school of social work and I learned a great deal about professional languages by comparing the conceptions that we and they teach to ‘preservice’ students.²³ One of the fundamental ideas that they had was *service delivery*: a social worker’s right to intervene derived from their agencies which exist to deliver a service, e.g. counselling, probation, alcohol recovery, adoption, etc. The schools are, in that sense, also institutions of service delivery—and teachers’ roles are institutionally derived. Which leads to the question: Do such institutions of *service delivery* have a routinely available capability and/or capacity to develop/invent curricula as distinct from ‘buying’ one of the varieties of curricula—the small variety—available in the larger cultural community. I believe that very few schools are staffed and budgeted to undertake *service invention* rather than *service delivery*.

Thus, for example, every high school has to ask how many languages it will teach and which ones. English and Spanish, or Chinese, French, German and Japanese? This involves the educational aspirations of the community. It involves administrators because they control budgets and staffing and community relations. It involves teacher education and teacher certification and teacher recruitment and stability. It involves personnel policies. In the first instance, the choices involve deliberating about these issues as issues of service delivery rather than deliberating about a curriculum. This involves deliberation about a curriculum that is appropriate to the resources, expectations and cultures of *this* community. What follows are choices among packages, i.e. textbooks and personnel. Schwab completely failed to understand these aspects of the schools because his entire experience had been in an elite university where, at the time he was being formed, was staffed and resourced for *service invention*. The task, when all was said and done, was to reinvent the scope and nature of the high school and college as services.

The distinction between *invention* and *delivery* is an important one.²⁴ The question is ‘who can invent curricula’ in the sense of ‘who has the capacity to invent curricula’? When I worked at the UIUC laboratory high school, we had all kinds of ideas about developing units on Jewish history in Europe: The question was ‘What did it mean to be an outsider to the Christian world’? But then the question quickly became: ‘Do any of us know anything about the history of Europe’s Jews and Jewish communities’? At that time none of us knew enough about Jewish history to turn our questions into anything resembling a (exportable) teaching unit.

We didn’t have the time to work on our project during that school year—there was preparation, grading, testing, etc. to be done at work and children to attend to at home—but we agreed to work on it during the summer. We didn’t! We didn’t do anything the next year! So, the questions become ‘Do you have the resources to do inventive curriculum work?’ and ‘Who has the resources necessary for inventive curriculum work?’ The most that schools can accomplish is effective service delivery and many schools cannot accomplish that!

Another thing that I tried to do was to introduce Illinois to an NSF programme called the *The Man-made World*.²⁵ In 1967, David Ausubel, a distinguished psychologist at UIUC—although I had met him at OISE—published a paper that was a fundamental critique of the science curriculum movement of the 1950s and 1960s.²⁶ He argued that the ‘science’ of that movement was far too abstract to have a mass appeal. He argued that it would make much more sense for schools to teach agriculture, engineering and medicine than biology, physics and chemistry. As fields of application they could be real to the kids and didn’t involve the abstraction of the university-preparatory ‘new’ curricula that were emerging.

I was interested in that idea and it turned out that there was an NSF project developing and disseminating an engineering curriculum, *The Man-made World (TMMW)*, which was first packaged

as a conventional textbook-based course and then in an activity-based version (Engineering Concepts Curriculum Project. (ECCP), 1971; Engineering Concepts Curriculum Project. (ECCP), 1973). We were able to spend a summer working on an evaluation of the summer training sites for ECCP that year.

The evaluation activity was fascinating and had all kinds of implications for thinking about curriculum change as a systemic project. Thus, one of the activities in the activity version of *TMMW* was an air-traffic control project, that is, a queuing project. The only teachers who knew how to begin to think about this were one or two men in one workshop who were air traffic controllers in the National Guard. And there was a retired navy captain who had commanded nuclear submarines and knew about all kinds of things: the rumour in the workshop was that he had a working reactor in his school. Compared to these people with their backgrounds in engineering, aviation, etc., the regular teachers did not have a clue. Most of the activities and the problems were out of their experience, and a summer workshop lasting three or so weeks could not teach them what they needed to know to teach *TMMW*.

Although NSF spent considerable money promoting the curriculum, it did not take off. I couldn't persuade anybody here to interest themselves in ECCP. We had a meeting on the campus with one of the leaders of the project, who was the Dean of Engineering at SUNY Stony Brook. We met with the then-Dean of the College of Engineering, whom he knew from graduate school, together with a number of engineers and education people. There was nobody among the education people who could pick *TMMW* up inasmuch as it was as far from their experience as it had been for the teachers in the summer workshop. In the College of Engineering all the people who were mentioned as being possibly interested in the ECCP projects were people who were typecast as 'teachers', that is, they had 'failed' as researchers. 'Successful' engineers had no time to pick up something like ECCP and work with schools and teachers.

It was through such experiences that I became aware of the institutional problems around major innovations, i.e. enhancement of schooling, namely, the point of view that Dewey (2001) had taken in *The Educational Situation*. I couldn't even raise an interest in ECCP at UIUC, and there was no way of getting it into schools. Schwab never understood such issues because he was in a private school which was well-resourced, and he had a kind of personality that rolled over obstacles.

3. *Didaktik* and curriculum

- R:** You have published quite a deal on *Didaktik*. Would you please tell us how you got interested in this German tradition and why it deserves attention?
- W:** Well, the beginning of the *Didaktik* adventure was purely adventitious. I shared with Walt Doyle a paper that I had gotten through my work on math education.²⁷ Later in a conversation, Walt asked me as someone who had spent time in Sweden and Germany about the tradition, *Didaktik*, that the paper came from. I said I had no idea, but I followed up with a German colleague, Stefan Hopmann, who was then at the IPN at Kiel, and he became very enthusiastic about communicating the *Didaktik* tradition to the English-speaking world where it was completely unknown. So, with the support of colleagues in Norway, Switzerland and Germany we organized a set of seminars on the German *Didaktik* and began to plan a book of translations of *Didaktik* writing.

In the course of this work, it became clear that *Didaktik* was, in a sense, 'practical'. It came out of the same Aristotelian and hermeneutic traditions as McKeon and Schwab, although *Didaktik* as a development of rhetoric has its own tradition.²⁸ We talk about reflective teaching in America, but nobody has made it very clear what reflective teaching is. *Didaktik* not only offers a framework for reflective teaching²⁹ but also a framework for unpacking Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)—remember that Shulman was a student and disciple of Schwab's. *Didaktik* is, in a sense, a model for reflective teaching and deliberative practice.

However, *Didaktik* doesn't translate into 'curriculum' because, I argue, the American curriculum tradition is essentially about building schools and of school systems whereas in the German tradition and the tradition of *Didaktik*, it is about an individual teacher's teaching within the framework that the state provides.

4. Liberal and general education: what do they mean for curriculum as a field?

- R:** Speaking about this German tradition, let me take one step further and direct our discussion to a more general level. I believe that two main questions of the field are: What to teach students? and How to do it? Further, I maintain that these questions are not new, especially the first one. One need look no further than the artes liberales (trivium and quadrivium) of the West to see that we have been dealing with this question for quite a while. These seven arts have consequently resulted in what we refer to today as general liberal education (Levine, 2006). Would you please talk about what you understand by this term and why we need a liberal education in this contemporary practice-oriented world of 'getting everything done'?
- W:** I remember that years ago there was a TV series on the history of art entitled *Civilization* presented by Kenneth Clark, the former director of the British National Gallery. It was about the history of the fine arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, landscape gardening, etc. However, in one of the later programmes, Clark is pictured flying into New York and says we are now in the 20th century and this, namely, New York, with its massive engineering below and on the ground and its urban landscape, is now the hallmark of 'civilization'. But, of course (and as he pointed out), that was a radical language shift because to that point 'civilization'—and the series—had been about the fine arts and classical and 'high' vernacular literatures. It was the civilization of an aristocracy, a gentry and of clerics. It was often rural inasmuch as its focus was the country house or rectory. Clark's new civilization was the achievement of (urban) entrepreneurs, engineers and architects, not of painters and parsons.

I think that this observation of Clark is at the heart of the question you pose. Liberal education as it existed until the 20th century was an idea about how to prepare people (men!) to be country gentlemen and country priests—and gentleman army and naval officers, lawyers and physicians. How do you prepare a person to be a gentleman-soldier and/or a country priest in terms of general culture and 'skill-set'? Liberal education is about the 'learned man skilled at speaking', *vir eruditus dicendi peritus*. It is a cosmopolitan awareness of the artefacts of civilization and an ability to participate in a mannered, 'civilized' society. I very much remember an exchange with a visiting friend of my son with whom he had lived when he was in the Peace Corps in Uzbekistan. We went to see one of the Jane Austen movies that were appearing in the early 21st century. I asked what he thought. Did it make any sense to him? He said 'Oh yes. It was exactly like the work of Gogol, Chekhov—Russian theatre'. In other words, the culture and sensibility of Jane Austen as expressed in this movie had, and has, a transcultural expression across the European world (and beyond to the former Soviet Central Asia).

The curricular problem of general education came about in America when the university was being filled with the children of working-class Italians, Irish Catholics, the first American-born generation from the families of the immigration from Europe of the 1890s and 1900s as well as the sons and daughters of the newly prosperous non-immigrant families. There was an enormous pressure for learning as a way out of the ghetto for the working class, but 'they' were not like 'us'. What did they need to know to become not exactly 'gentle' but to participate in the culture more broadly? The traditional enculturation of the college that took place in dorms, in theatre, the refectory, etc. was not possible. Their universities were in the main not residential, so these structures were of limited utility. Can culture be taught? What should they know? The genesis of the idea of *general education* lay in this situation meaning that they needed introductions to literature, art, classical humanities, social science, science, etc.

What emerged from this in the 1920s and 1930s was a general education movement in American colleges with its explicit initial charge to give students an understanding of Western civilization and culture, American civilization, the constitution, American voting practices, etc., as well as a disciplinary vocational major. In this period, 'liberal education' and 'general education' became kind of synonyms, but they are not. They emerged in quite different contexts. Occasionally, they merge—in Chicago because McKeon had come out of the general education curriculum movement at Columbia, but his true preoccupation was liberal education.

Thus, McKeon, Schwab, etc. at Chicago were in the business of designing a 'modern' liberal education curriculum built around the twin poles of enculturation and modern *dicendi peritus*, the development of the 'powers of the mind', a mastery of the skills/powers of the *trivium*, namely, grammar, logic and rhetoric. The Chicago faculty saw students coming from North Dakota, South Dakota and Colorado, Canada, as well as the ethnic ghettos of Chicago, places they had no idea about and, more importantly, whom they saw as not knowing anything. But, when their students went back to North Dakota, South Dakota, or wherever they came from, the hope and expectation was that they would become judges, legislators, governors, professors and the hope was that an education built on the *trivium* would give them character and, just as importantly, confidence in their powers of reasoning.

In other words, liberal education and general education are different. They have different tasks. General education in the college is important in America because of the structure of the university and school. There is no 'sixth form' or *Gymnasium* with a task of general education prior to college and/or university. In America, general education is a task for the college.

- R:** I think that there are as many critics of the idea of liberal education as there are supporters. How would you answer a critic of liberal education who claims that it represents nothing but the manners of an elite bourgeoisie?
- W:** Liberal education is not associated with the bourgeoisie but with rural gentry and the 'learned' professions, that is law, medicine, higher-level Christian clergy, etc. C. Arnold Anderson, the sociologist and comparativist and one of the great men of Chicago, was the son of a country doctor from South Dakota. He was a commonsensical American republican and democrat—not in the party sense. He was also interested in the sociology of higher education.

Arnold had worked in Kentucky and the South and used to say, 'The clearest proof of complete failure of the Southern higher education system was segregation'. I would say 'Why'? and he would say 'Because the core function of higher education is the socialization of local elites. Local elites have to learn cosmopolitan values and the skills of implementing cosmopolitan values, that is, winning elections. Segregation is completely rejected by the cosmopolitan culture. In the South they maintained it. And that is the absolute proof of the failure of higher education'. He would add a sketch of the study he would have liked to have done at that time: Fluoride in drinking water was the big thing; this was of course compulsory medication—because elites decided that you would be better off with fluoridation. Scientifically, fluoride reduced tooth decay in children and was harmless. What he wanted to undertake was a national analysis of wins and losses in referenda about putting fluoride in local water supplies because, he would say, where fluoride was voted down local elites were failing. These local elites were the superintendents and the principals of schools, the attorneys and physicians, etc., i.e. the university class in town, who were or were not socialized and skilled in liberal cosmopolitan norms *and* skills. Socialization is one of the tasks of the ideas of liberal education and is not bourgeois in the European connotation of bourgeoisie.

5. Assessment and curriculum

- R:** Approaching the end of our time, I would like to ask you what you think about large-scale assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), etc. that have become so popular in the field?
- W:** I am not sure if they are popular in the curriculum field. However, in America, the really grave problem in and around schools is huge inequities in the distribution of successful learning outcomes, that is, achievement. It has taken large-scale assessment projects like the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to make that abundantly clear. We know that there are huge within-nation disparities in achievement. That finding raises two further questions. First, is there merit in an international large-scale assessment like PISA or TIMSS? Second, how do we think about these results of large-scale nation and international assessments and what do we do about them? By condemning assessment, curriculum avoids the question of how you think about the results from the studies and avoids the question of what you do about it. The results are unambiguous. There are questions about how the results are used by governments, how they are being used to create new public management-type targets for the schools. That gets down to people, to personalities.

But, the issue of the use of these results by governments is a different matter to the use of these results by people who are overwhelmingly concerned with issues around inequity or racial injustice. In other words, I don't understand the complete flight of curriculum away from assessment. Curriculum has to embrace measurement, i.e. testing. The beginning of handling a disease is understanding the incidence and epidemiology of the disease. We have this huge problem of achievement.

Because of international assessment we can even model the 'US problem' as it appears when set against the distributions in other countries. How do you think about it? The results of international assessments typically report means, but a mean is a function of distribution. If you look at distributions and plot the range, all countries more or less have the same distribution of outcomes in the upper quartile. The problems occur in the lowest quartile where, at the time of the IEA Second International Mathematics Study (SIMS) and in the cases of America, New Zealand and Belgium, there was seemingly no floor on achievement. Other countries seem to put a floor on achievement.

I was at a conference once and posed a question to a presenter who had compared Chicago school achievement with that of some Chinese and Japanese cities. 'Your sample shows Chicago schools achieve poorly compared to your Chinese and Japanese cities. Does the sample for "Chicago" include suburban schools in Chicago? In other words, is your sample drawn from metro Chicago or the city of Chicago?' He said 'metro Chicago'—but if that were the case, where were the North Shore schools in the sample? I think that North Shore schools are as good as any school around the world. They might differ. They teach English whereas other schools might teach Chinese. In our SIMS data, the American top quartile schools are the same as every other top quartile school of any country.

An unfortunate outcome of the international large-scale assessment is that people in the top quartile of schools go crazy about improving the achievement of their students and the bottom quartile of schools doesn't care a damn. Then, the whole policy focus becomes on improvement of, e.g. math, science and STEM education, but the only schools that pick up the programme are the top quartile schools, which are already top.

It is bizarre that we don't even know how to think about the processes and outcomes of large-scale assessment. If the professionals, teachers, curricularists, psychometricians and policy makers can't think about assessment, what hope is there of teaching the politicians how to think about it. If infant death rates are high, you need to know where to target your resources. We refuse to think

about where achievement is catastrophic. So, we target the system's resources in exactly the wrong way, or more prudently in less than optimal ways.

- R:** Lastly, I would like to ask you your future projections for the field of curriculum. What is going to happen to the field in future? Or, maybe more up to the point, what should happen?
- W:** I don't know. I have a friend who is trying to get out of his senior faculty position in Asia. He can't find a position in curriculum in the United States. As I suggested above, there is not less 'work' for the field, albeit differently framed, but I see the field's on-going work being transferred again to subjects, to policy analysis, to psychology and even to teacher education because we are still in full flight from the field.

Notes

1. I created this framework as a result of my earlier 'informal' discussions with Dr. Westbury about the field by noting recurring themes and issues in these discussions. The structure of this framework and its basic parts can be seen in the subsections of the paper. The first set of key questions revolved around the field's history with a focus on Schwab, deliberative curriculum making, *Didaktik*, assessment, etc.
2. I would generalize this assertion and say that curriculum always emerges as a field of study to 'manage' a secular transition of schooling.
3. See Trow (1961).
4. See Maccia (1966).
5. See Beauchamp (1961).
6. For example, Taba (1962); Smith, Stanley, and Shores (1950); Mager (1962).
7. See Hodgetts (1968). This project, in which I assisted a teacher who had designed and administered an important questionnaire—but did not have the skills to analyze it—was a way of working out how OISE was to relate to the professional communities of the province.
8. See Winch (1958); Scriven (1959); Dray (1957).
9. Bellack's stance was more complex than most. By this time he had undertaken one of the few pieces of curriculum research by someone in the field (see Bellack, Davitz, Kliebard, & Hyman, 1966).
10. See Kliebard (1986); Goodson (1983).
11. See Bellack et al. (1966).
12. See Reid and Walker (1975).
13. The OISE publication, the precursor of Curriculum Inquiry, called Curriculum Theory Network, reflected the definition of the problem as one of 'curriculum theory'.
14. See Counts (1932).
15. Michael Apple has his degree from TC.
16. See Westbury (1972).
17. See Levine (2006).
18. See Reid (1999).
19. See Null (2011).
20. Lee Shulman was an undergraduate student in the University of Chicago College. Elliott Eisner did his doctorate at Chicago as did Michael Connelly, Tom Roby, Peter Pereira and Ilene Harris. Decker Walker was Eisner's student. Reid worked with Walker at Stanford during an early (in his career) sabbatical. I worked at Chicago but had learned about Schwab at Alberta where there were a group of Chicago alums in the Faculty of Education there who had all taken courses with Schwab.
21. These distinctions are better made in German; see Benner and English (2004).
22. See Dewey (2001).
23. See Westbury, Korbek, and Simon (1973).
24. See Westbury (1980); Westbury and Howson (1980).
25. See Engineering Concepts Curriculum Project (ECCP). (1971, 1973).
26. See Ausubel (1967).
27. See Kirsch (2000).
28. See Künzli (2000).
29. See Senn-Fennell (2000).

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