

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND THEORY

In June 1970, in Edmonton, was launched Project Canada West (PCW), the western regional arm of the Canada Studies Foundation's curriculum development consortium.¹ Ted Aoki recalls “urg[ing] the assembled curriculum developers to consider what Hodgetts was really asking when he posed the question to social studies educators across Canada, *What Culture? What Heritage?*”² Aoki suggested that Hodgetts was “challenging social studies educators to examine with rigor what they think and what they do in social studies education,” requiring those PCW team members present “to retain that critical stance that Hodgetts took, and ask openly and rigorously ‘What Curriculum? What Instructional Plan? What Instruction?’”³

“Now, some six years later, with the Canada Studies Foundation's Five Year Phase 1 completed,” Aoki continues, “it seems timely to reflect critically upon selected dimensions of curriculum theoretics that emanated from the activities in particular of PCW,” specifically “five years of curriculum development activity involving many hundreds of people, and after an expenditure of several hundred thousand dollars,” to see if “advances have been made in the theoretic realm of curriculum design.”⁴

Aoki allows that he was “directly or indirectly, party to the activities of Project SURT (Study of Urban-Rural Transition), one of the fourteen curriculum subprojects of PCW,” providing him “an insider's view,” enabling him “to reflect as an insider upon three curricular theoretic concerns,” including “(1) exploring the theoretic in ‘the practical’ of curriculum development; (2) reconceptualizing the concept of curriculum implementation; (3) reformulating a curriculum evaluation paradigm.”⁵ Aoki acknowledges “these themes suggest immediately that I am not dwelling in the domain of the major thrust of CSF, that is, the development of actual school programs, where its achievements have been without doubt productive.”⁶ Aoki's interest is instead the implications for “curriculum theory” in “CSF-sponsored curriculum development activity.”⁷

Project Canada West and the Canada Studies Foundation has focused on “the practising teacher as the key personality in curriculum development,”⁸ a fact that prompts Aoki to recall Joseph J. Schwab's critique of the “lack of conceptual advance in curriculum theoretic thought in recent years,” prompting him to declare the curriculum field “moribund.”⁹ Aoki appreciates Schwab's allegation as causing “curriculum thinkers to shift the very ground they stand on,” provoked by Schwab's insistence that the field's focus shift from the theoretic to the practical¹⁰ (emphasizing “deliberation”), a focus evident in CSF's direct involvement “in the practical world of program development, [so] it seems worthwhile to consider opportunities that exist for studying the domain of the practical.”¹¹

While Aoki concurs that “the practical day-to-day world of curriculum development merits intensive attention,” he adds: “I feel, however, that merely moving

to the practical is not sufficiently fundamental.”¹² “An authentic radical departure,” Aoki continues, “calls for not only a lateral shift to the practical but also a vertical shift that leads us to a deeper understanding of the program developers' theoretic stance.”¹³ He appreciates that “this stance may be implicit or even unconscious, based as it is on assumptions that are frequently taken for granted in dealing with the practical problems of program development.”¹⁴

Theory for Aoki is no split-off supplementary domain, not only an effort to understand the practical but also the “construction of his own meaningful human and social reality.”¹⁵ Theory represents, then, the second side of double consciousness, as the curriculum developer is also and “simultaneously engaged in self-reflection as he turns over in his mind what he is taking for granted in the way of cognitive interests, his assumptions about man and world, and approaches to that world.”¹⁶ Through such self-reflection resides “the possibility of the curriculum builder becoming conscious of the perspective which he himself takes for granted as he acts, and also of how his perspective gives shape to the program he designs for his students.”¹⁷

Referencing “reconceptualists such as Michael Apple and James MacDonald,” Aoki advocates the exploration “at a fundamental level [the] fundamental perspectives found in the lived practical world of curriculum developers, perspectives which typically are unconsciously held and unavoidably used by curriculum developers.”¹⁸ Schwab's “shift to the practical fits hand in glove with the CSF's emphasis on the practical,” Aoki notes, adding:

I feel strongly that the CSF is in a good position to make a contribution to curriculum reconceptualization by coming to grips with the meaning of the practical and by pursuing rigorously the theoretic of the practical. By so doing, a measured move can be made in the direction of what Schwab regards as a quest for new principles and methods in curriculum thought.¹⁹

While those involved in the Project may not have taken up the theoretical side of their practical work, Aoki's advice represents a significant moment in the intellectual history of curriculum studies in Canada, as it demonstrates not only his transnational erudition but also his recontextualization of scholarship focused elsewhere – in this case, the United States - into local language and curricular concerns.²⁰

“Towards the end of Phase 1,” Aoki tells us, “I participated in implementation-oriented mini-conference sessions conceived as a post-prototype program development activity of subproject teams,” sessions in service to “implementation as a phase of a natural linear schema of practical events,” implementation as a of “putting a program into practice.”²¹ A “more elaborate” articulation of this idea, he continues, is the RDDA model (Research - Development - Diffusion - Adoption), a “fancier” version of the common-sense one noted above.²² “In popular curriculum language,” he continues “‘pilot-testing’ seems to be synonymous with ‘putting into practice’ or

'diffusing and adopting'.²³ PCW resisted this linear conception of "implementation" by holding "mini-conferences" wherein "prospective initial users from across Canada were brought together with developers," an effort at "integrat[ing] program evaluation, program revision, and program diffusion."²⁴ Aoki explains:

Invited teachers were not only informed of the program but were also requested to participate in the pilot evaluation of it, and simultaneously to participate in the revision the prototype. Thus the invited teachers were not viewed as merely passive consumers of the program, but rather as co-actors in productive activities - trying the program out in a classroom situation, evaluating it, and recommending revisions.²⁵

Such a shift in conception of "potential users as consumers to a conception of producer-consumer is a significant one," Aoki concludes, one "which merits closer study."²⁶

"PCW's conceptual advance regarding implementation," Aoki adds, "merits extended study for it deals with a dimension which has plagued many curriculum-developing agencies," namely understanding implementation not as the "dissemination of a product but in terms of the meaning of a given program to teachers."²⁷ In this latter conception "producers and potential users establish a relationship in the mini-conference situation whereby they are enabled to assume complementary roles in the implementation process."²⁸

The "prevailing view," Aoki reports, "is that curriculum evaluation is an activity secondary to the primary activity of curriculum development, the last of the four steps in the (misnamed²⁹) Tyler Rationale.³⁰ The "low importance attached to evaluation," Aoki continues, "is often reflected in the usual procedure in which funds for evaluative activity are allocated, that is, *after* program development budgeting is completed."³¹ Aoki finds "certain dimensions of the overall evaluation of SURT" as meriting "some comment," including (1) consideration given to "formative"³² evaluation, (2) the use of the ethnomethodology³³ in SURT evaluations, and (3) program development regarded as a dynamic historical, social, and cultural process," in contrast to a "psychometrically oriented approach to evaluation."³⁴ Moreover, SURT evaluation, Aoki concludes, "accommodated both the outsider's (etic) and insider's (emic) perspectives, that is, the conceptual scheme of both the external evaluator and that of the program developers themselves," thereby enabling "examination of the meaning that program developers assign to their own activities."³⁵ What the future will bring, he notes, are the meanings teachers and students associate with the program.

COMMENTARY

Here the legendary curriculum theorist critiques Schwab's emphasis on the practical, acknowledging the intertwined reciprocal relationship between theory and practice, illustrated by his praise of these practices of curriculum development and evaluation of SURT.

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ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Aoki 1977, 49.
 - ² Aoki 1977, 49. See Hodgetts 1968.
 - ³ Aoki 1977, 49.
 - ⁴ Aoki 1977, 49-50.
 - ⁵ Aoki 1977, 50.
 - ⁶ Aoki 1977, 50.
 - ⁷ Aoki 1977, 50.
 - ⁸ Aoki 1977, 50.
 - ⁹ Aoki 1977, 50; Schwab 1970; Huebner 1999, 241.
 - ¹⁰ Aoki 1977, 50-51.
 - ¹¹ Aoki 1977, 51. For more Schwab and specifically his Judaic sources of “deliberation,” see Block 2004. Note’s Aoki shift to “studying,” now a key concept in curriculum studies: see Ruitenberg 2017.
 - ¹² Aoki 1977, 51.
 - ¹³ Aoki 1977, 51.
 - ¹⁴ Aoki 1977, 51. I am reminded of Alvin Gouldner’s attention to sociologists’ “domain assumptions.”
 - ¹⁵ Aoki 1977, 51. This follows from his sense that curriculum developers are “engaged [not only] in program engineering and solving curriculum development problems,” but also, as noted, in constructing reality.
 - ¹⁶ Aoki 1977, 51.
 - ¹⁷ Aoki 1977, 51.
 - ¹⁸ Aoki 1977, 51-52. Regarding the “reconceptualists,” see Pinar 1975, Rocha 2020.
 - ¹⁹ Aoki 1977, 52.
 - ²⁰ This is the theoretical challenge of internationalization. For an intriguing instance – focused on how Schwab’s concept of deliberation was taken up in India – see Chacko 2015.
 - ²¹ Aoki 1977, 53.
 - ²² Aoki 1977, 53.
 - ²³ Aoki 1977, 53.
 - ²⁴ Aoki 1977, 53-54.
 - ²⁵ Aoki 1977, 54.
 - ²⁶ Aoki 1977, 54.
 - ²⁷ Aoki 1977, 54.
 - ²⁸ Aoki 1977, 54.

²⁹ Even Tyler didn't call it the Tyler Rationale, although he didn't resist the phrase. He knew he had merely summarized the "common wisdom" of the field since the 1920s, as I show: Pinar 2015, 99.

³⁰ Aoki 1977, 54.

³¹ Aoki 1977, 54.

³² <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/basics/formative-summative.html>

Accessed September 21, 2020

³³ Ethnomethodology is an approach within sociology that focuses on the way people, as rational actors, make sense of their everyday world by employing practical reasoning rather than formal

[https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/socialresearch/ethnomethodology.](https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/socialresearch/ethnomethodology.htm)

[htm](https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/socialresearch/ethnomethodology.htm) Accessed October 7, 2020.

³⁴ Aoki 1977, 55.

³⁵ Aoki 1977, 55.