Recalling the late 1960's when our nation was beset with social upheaval and student protest, Harry Reasoner (1978), the newscaster, said "The past is like a foreign country; they do things differently there." For most of us, the era of New Left ideology and campus confrontation is like a foreign country, and for many the distance is agreeable. For some individuals in the curriculum field, however, it is still the late 1960's. The radical countercultural rhetoric of the late 1960's echoes again in the late 1970's, but this time it is sounded by a small cadre of curricularists who call themselves "reconceptualists" (Pinar, 1978, p. 5). According to their chief spokesman, the ultimate aim of the reconceptualists is self-reflective "emancipation" from distortions of communication imposed by technological control (Pinar, 1978, p. 9-11).

It will be recalled that emancipation from the domination of science and technology was a major theme of the New Left. In his analysis of student protest (and faculty sympathy), Lipset (1969) found the anti-technology theme to be a reflection of the resentment of scholars in the humanities toward the growing emphasis on intellectual technology: systematic and quantitative social science. He concluded:

The differentiation of social science knowledge into distinct fields of technical expertise has sharply undermined the role of the humanist intellectual who has traditionally claimed the right to comment on and influence public policy. (pp. 505-506)

Certainly, simplistic ideological solutions for reforming society do not fare well against arguments derived from specialized knowledge. And "general" (humanistically oriented) intellectuals have had to face the added insult of seeing government contracts in social research awarded to scholars in the policy-relevant fields. Moreover, Lipset's analysis seems to be borne out by the disproportionate number of student activists from the humanities and "softer" social sciences. However, the point of the foregoing analysis is that the leftist anti-technology theme, which is a backlash against scientific scholarship in policy-relevant fields (economics, for example), has been portrayed by the reconceptualists as a curriculum theory. The themes of existentialism, political consciousness, and "cultural revolution" dominate reconceptualist literature. 2

Despite the expanding literature labeled "reconceptualist" in recent years, the adherents or proponents of the reconceptualist view are difficult to identify; most of the literature is either written or edited by William Pinar, and much of this edited literature bears only a tacit linkage with the reconceptualist views as espoused by Pinar. For example, Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists, edited by William Pinar, is a collection of previously published articles, most of which are addressed to topics having little or no bearing on reconceptualism. Here one finds articles by Lawrence Cremin and Herbert Kliebard whose writings are not even remotely related to "reconceptualism."

Pinar tells us that the reconceptualists are "heirs" to the curriculum field (1978, p. 7), but an analysis of reconceptualist writing reveals the reconceptualists as radical critics and not the curriculum theorists they claim to be.

Just as paranoid phraseology characterized the rhetoric of student demagogues and radical critics of the 1960's, so paranoid phraseology suffuses much of reconceptualists' "theoretical" writing. In Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists (1975), Pinar writes that through schooling one loses one's life's blood, is filled with embalming fluid, which is the alien that is the estranged self, the self fabricated by unaware compliance and collusion with significant others and,

The cumulative effect is madness. (pp. 361 and 374)

Pinar provides no documentation of the effects of schooling on the "self." We are left to depend on his rhetoric. Nevertheless, Pinar does quote from Adler, Allport, Jung, Sullivan and Fromm, none of whom say that schooling drives children mad. Only Pinar says this, admitting that his psychological analysis is "overly simple to be sure, but the point is there nonetheless (1975, pp. 361 and 374)."
Similarly, Murphy and Pilder, also writing in *Curriculum Theorizing* (1975), tell us that schools are formal bureaucratic organizations that "deny the highest possibilities for human development by colluding with a society based on the same denial" (p. 347). Both critiques refer to "collusion" by institutions against individuals. This is rhetoric rather than rigorous analysis and is reflective of the psychopathology of the radical left. To say that schools collude with society is to overlook the fact that the educational system is conducted by society. To present the relationship between school and society as an undercover for deliberately repressive measures, and to say that one can only find the "real" reasons behind the educational process by using psychological or economic analyses merely echoes the rhetoric of the radical left, straight out of the 1960's. Ravitch (1977) describes the radical left of the 1960's in the words:

A correlate of the radical left's disavowal of the political system was the belief that American history was composed of legends that justified the status quo. Thus one could understand events only by looking beneath the surface for purposely obscure patterns, and both Freudian and Marxist analyses provided the intellectual tools for doing so. Whether the "real" reason for some event was psychological or economic, it seemed that things were never what they appeared . . . (p. 7)

**Criticism Promulgated as Theory**

One might reasonably assume that as "heirs" to the curriculum field, reconceptualists would not stop with criticism but would translate their concern into an actual undertaking: the development of reformist curricula. However, this appears not to be the case; reconceptualists show surprisingly little interest in the curriculum. Pinar even argues that "an intellectual and cultural distance from our constituency (school practitioners) is required for the present in order to develop a comprehensive critique and theoretical program to be of any meaningful assistance now or later" (1978, p. 6). This notion would have been an anathema to Dewey (1929) who wrote of the "indispensable necessity" for "some kind of vital current flowing between the field worker and the research worker. Without this flow," Dewey warned, "the latter is not able to judge the real scope of the problem to which he addresses himself" (p. 44).

An in-depth study, "Schooling in America," directed by John Goodlad, has found the education profession "badly segmented" with "researchers and practitioners often at odds." According to Goodlad, this is the major problem with which the profession must contend (Shane, p. 50). An "intellectual distance," as prescribed by Pinar, could only exacerbate the problem.

By effectively removing himself from the world of action, Pinar provides the clue to his identity. Pinar is a radical, not a reformer. As Ravitch has pointed out, "the reformer is one who grapples with political and social problems and seeks solutions," while the radical remains "aloof from the system and from any ultimate responsibility for its success or failure" (p. 8).

Maxine Greene (1978) sees this problem clearly in Pinar's orientation. Criticizing his "lack of concern for social injustices, the damages inflicted by poverty, the tracking of children, the neglect of children's rights," she notes that "he is interested in . . . and committed to radical critique."

Pinar characterizes the reconceptualists as a movement, but the evidence is otherwise. A movement must meet all of the following requirements: an identifiable theory, a group of identifiable adherents to that theory, and a significant impact in the world of practice. As one reviews the work of William Pinar, nothing is more striking than the absence of an identifiable reconceptualist theory. Pinar's theoretician is the German neo-Marxist philosopher Jurgen Habermas, who argues that class antagonisms have been displaced by technological "domination" as the fundamental problem of mankind (1970, pp. 81-122). (Habermas' theoretician is Herbert Marcuse.) The democratic decision-making process is an impossibility within the confines of a rational-bureaucratic-technology where politicians are the agents of a scientific intelligentsia (Habermas, 1970, pp. 107-122). Technology has replaced rationalization, and only free communication can emancipate humanity from technical control, contends Habermas. For this to come about, there must be a dualism between "work" (instrumental action) and symbolic interaction; between science and technology on the one hand, and communication on the other (Habermas, 1971). This is dangerous, because what is being called for is a split between the two cultures. If we cannot make decisions on the basis of the best available evidence, how do we make them? Through mere dogma, convention, faith, or superstition?

The Habermas analysis is highly appealing to humanist intellectuals who are concerned about the declining status of diffuse intellectualism. Its appeal for curriculum theorists who seek to develop the understandings that citizens must share as members of a joint culture (humanistic and scientific) is incomprehensible. Yet the obverse of the needed unification and synthesis is put forward as a theory of curriculum by Pinar. Reconceptualism pits the humanities and sciences against each other and seeks to widen the gap (with cheers for the former and hard words for the latter). It favors mystical illumination ("heightened consciousness") over reason, and is therefore not curriculum knowledge but a promiscuous enthusiasm for whatever advertises itself as counter to our culture.

For Habermas, education is a key structure for legitimizing economic and social inequities (1975, p. 77). But Habermas is a German sociologist, and writes from the van-

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phenomena; without them it would (1970, p. 52). The natural scientist is concerned with the behavior of natural elements as part of the broader context of society. Kuhn's view of scientific development is still pertinent as ever (p. 48). The point may be generalized to the curriculum field. A new curriculum theory must have applications to educational phenomena. It is clear that reconceptualism does not meet this criterion and would be unacceptable to the community of curricularists. More importantly, the term "theory" is used all too loosely in the field of curriculum. A doctrine is not a theory.

At best, reconceptualism is a remnant of the broader countercultural and student protest movement of the 1960's and early 1970's which has all but disappeared from pedagogy. Having failed to meet the first criterion for a movement—that is, failing to posit an identifiable theory, the reconceptualists must fail to meet the second criterion—adopts to the theory. Moreover, since its theoretical postulates remove it from the world of action, reconceptualism fails to meet the third criterion—an impact in the world of practice (the schools).

Finally, the publications of the reconceptualists are disjointed and do not convey an impression of movement toward some definite end.

Fictional Categories

Claiming to use Habermas as the framework for his classificatory scheme, Pinar marks off the curriculum field into "traditionalists," "conceptual-empiricists," and "reconceptualists." Curiously, Pinar does not go to primary sources (the works of Habermas himself), but uses Bernstein's The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory as his "sourcebook" (1978, p. 5). This becomes even more curious in view of Bernstein's conclusion, which questions the tenability of Habermas' thesis regarding the alleged categories of knowledge and inquiry: "It is a fiction—and not a useful methodological one—to suggest that there are categorically different types of inquiry and knowledge" (p. 223).

In what Habermas calls a "radical critique of knowledge" (1971, p. vii), which is part of his attempt to develop a "critical theory of society," he argues that man has three discrete cognitive interests: technical, practical, and emancipatory. Corresponding to these interests are three types of science.

The approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interest; that of the historical-heurmeneutic sciences incorporates a practical one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates the emancipatory cognitive interest. (1971, p. 308).

Empirical-analytic sciences are oriented toward technical control, historical-heurmeneutic sciences toward mutual understanding (free, non-distortive communication) in practical affairs, and the critically oriented sciences toward emancipation. The natural sciences and "hard" social sciences represent man's technical interest; sociology, history, and political science are examples of historical-heurmeneutic sciences; Freud's psychoanalysis and Marx's theory and practice of critique are the emancipatory disciplines and form the basis for Habermas' "critical theory of society" (1971, pp. 214-310). Habermas' "critical theory" is highly programmatic. Its objective is open communication and political action based on unconstrained consensus, rather than on technical knowledge. Habermas is attempting to restore "practical" discourse as a basis for decisions in the policy realm (1971, pp. 316-317).

But as Bernstein (1976) points out, the empirical-analytic sciences cannot be characterized as representing a technical interest, "for at their very foundation they require interpretative principles and a rational resolution of the conflict of interpretations." Moreover, the "philosophy and history of science is deeply questioning the categorical distinctions that separate even the hard natural sciences from what Habermas calls the historical-heurmeneutic disciplines" (p. 222).

In a fascinating essay, "Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice," Kuhn (1977) argues that "the choices scientists make between competing theories depend not only on shared criteria—those my critics call objective—but also on idiosyncratic factors dependent on individual biography and personality" (p. 329). Thus we see that actual practice lessens a separation between the empirical-analytic sciences and the critically oriented sciences (one of which is psychology). Furthermore,
as Bernstein argues, the boundary between the "information" that Habermas calls the output of empirical-analytic sciences and practical knowledge is nonexistent (p. 222).

If Habermas' scheme is a fiction, however, so is the outcome of what Greene (1978) calls "Pinar's idiosyncratic handling of the Habermas constructs" (p. 7). In Pinar's reductionist scheme, the traditionalists represent the practical interest, the conceptual-empiricists represent the technical interest, and the reconceptualists represent the emancipatory interest (Pinar, 1978). And whereas Habermas' technical interest corresponds with the objectivity of science (the techniques and outcomes of scientific research), Pinar arbitrarily reduces this to a narrow and simplistic conceptual empiricism. Moreover, although the experimentalists in the curriculum field have long been distinguished for their commitment to a unity between the theoretical and the practical in educational research, and in making curricular decisions according to the best available research evidence, Pinar portrays them as being concerned almost exclusively with the practical—to the detriment of theory and research.

According to Pinar, the traditionalists (he names Tyler, Taba, Smith, Stanley, Shores, and the present authors) "have not been theoretical... in their books they have focused on school people... and 'kids.'” Pinar contends this lack of concern for theory caused the narrow discipline-centered curriculum reforms of the 1960’s (1978, p. 6). The fact that these reforms were conceived and promoted by university scholar-specialists in the academic disciplines, and that a number of curricularists whom Pinar labels as "traditionalists" were among the most outspoken critics of the disciplinary reforms (Tanner & Tanner, 1975) is conveniently ignored by Pinar. He goes on to claim that in the discipline-reform movement, the curricularists adopted a social science model and the conceptual-empiricists, who had social science backgrounds (and consequently knew nothing about the history of the curriculum field), dominated the scene. The conceptual-empiricists were even worse than the traditionalists when it came to technical control, argues Pinar. We are told that in Beauchamp's Curriculum Theory "the practical becomes even more the technical" (Pinar, 1978, p. 9). This claim is followed by rhetoric, but no analysis.

According to Pinar, in the 1970’s the field of curriculum took a turn for the better with the arrival of the reconceptualists. Their allegiance is not to practitioners or "kids;" they aspire to an "emancipatory discipline" of curriculum. "What would an emancipatory discipline of curriculum look like?," asks Pinar. "This is not clear to me, although my sense is that the movement in the field that is the reconceptualization aspires to such work (1978, p. 9).

Pinar has no difficulty with the ambiguity of the rationale of reconceptualism, for an emancipatory discipline of curriculum is essentially radical criticism in the guise of "critical theory." As with other radical tracts it is based on selected constructs from Marx and Freud. And in the vein of the counterculture of the 1960’s, scientific inquiry is rejected as these constructs are alchemized by a process of inner-centered contemplation which is somehow to move through a transcendental-existential levitation to bring about the promised emancipation. After telling us of his devotion to Zen Buddhism and Hatha Yoga postures, Pinar describes the emancipatory process in these words:

This process of turning inward to examine one's *careere* will lead to a generalized inner-centeredness and hopefully initiate or further the process of individuation, leading to the gradual formation of the transcendental ego. (1975, pp. 358 and 410).

Aside from this mystical alchemy, Pinar's classificatory scheme for the curriculum field bears no relation to reality. It is an invention to suit his own purposes. Consider, for example, his classification of Tyler as a "traditionalist" (a leader of an atheoretical, ahistorical group). Tyler was Dean of Social Science at the University of Chicago and was the first Director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, where he served in this capacity from 1953-1967. Tyler was Director of Evaluation for the Eight-Year Study in which he and his associates systematically assessed the outcomes of progressive curriculum designs which rejected the traditional college preparatory programs of the high schools.

Hilda Taba’s research on the development of critical thinking and her efforts to apply scientific principles to the techniques of curriculum planning and evaluation made significant contributions to the body of concepts in the field of curriculum. Smith, Stanley, and Shores (1957) constructed a theoretical framework for curriculum based on the develop-
ment of a critical intelligence and the ability to solve social problems. The theoretical principles in their classic work on curriculum development fell squarely in the realm of social policy. Interestingly, too, Dewey and the progressivists viewed ideas as the outcome of a community of minds ("Communicative competence," or undistorted communication, did not originate with Habermas.) But Dewey believed that the test of ideas is in their practical consequences.

What is most striking about Pinar's portrayal of the curriculum field is its atheoretical and ahistorical character. Pinar has used Habermas as a way of seeing the curriculum field and, as Greene observes, the grid "exerts its own demands" (p. 8). Fact and fancy are deliberately blurred and interchanged to fit convenient labelings and categories in a repository of doctrine, and so, progressives and experimentalists are labeled and categorized as "traditionalists." Natural science and social science are reduced to a narrow empiricism. The entire culture is caricatured as being in an arrested condition. According to Pinar:

The point for curricularists is this: the generally debilitating, arrested condition of American culture forbids profound intellectual movement and achievement.

For movement to occur, we must shift our attention from the technical and the practical, and dwell on the notion of emancipation. (1978, p. 10)

How this "emancipation" will derive from reconceptualist ideology is never made clear. We are simply expected to accept the notion that the curriculum field, and indeed the entire culture, will be emancipated somehow by the new alchemists and concierges of countercultural ideology who call themselves reconceptualists.

Notes


References


