"INTERESTING, IF TRUE": HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE "RECONCEPTUALIZATION" OF CURRICULUM STUDIES

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ABSTRACT: During the 1970s, the curriculum field underwent a so-called reconceptualization that was characterized by a shift in priority away from a commitment to developing curriculum and toward an interest in understanding curriculum. This "reconceptualization" relied on narrow interpretations of the early 20th century origins of the field, of the Tyler rationale, of the post-Sputnik National Science Foundation curriculum projects, and of Kuhn's concept of paradigmatic change. After exposing the limitations of these interpretations, alternative ways to understand the reconceptualization are explored. The reconceptualization is explained as (1) a reflection of a wider disillusionment with traditional institutions and a corresponding retreat from public purposes to a preoccupation with private interests, (2) an example of "interesting social theory," and (3) an "interpersonal-affiliative" phenomenon. Recent signs of interest on the part of reconceptualists in reconciliation with the repudiated historic field are analyzed.

...the ability to define the meaning of the past grants the power to define the meaning of the present and the future;...people without a historical memory are easily manipulated through myths of the present. To lack a narrative of one's own past, from the personal to the national level, is to fall victim to the pseudohistorical representations of others.

During the past 20 years, a variety of new theories appeared in the curriculum literature. A focus on understanding curriculum from the vantage points of disciplines such as political science, philosophy, psychology, and theology often eclipsed

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1Attributed to Gertrude Stein.

practical matters of curriculum development in scholarly and even professional journals. This shift in emphasis from curriculum development to curriculum understanding is attributed to a purported "reconceptualization" of the curriculum field that began during the 1970s. Since that time, a particular historical account of the reconceptualization has prevailed. In the late 1990s, this account is in danger of becoming a metanarrative—an unquestioned explanation that privileges one historical interpretation while delegitimizing others. New understandings of the reconceptualization of the curriculum field during the 1970s can be attained by examining it from alternative historical perspectives.

Such perspectives can be achieved by first summarizing the standard account of the reconceptualization and then revealing the reliance of this account on narrow interpretations and incomplete depiction of the National Science Foundation reforms, the Tyler rationale, the origins of the curriculum field, and Kuhn's concept of paradigmatic change. Once the limitations of the standard account of the reconceptualization are exposed, alternative understandings can be attained by considering the reconceptualization as a reflection of pervading trends in American social thought, as a manifestation of "interesting social theory," and as an "interpersonal-affiliative phenomenon." Finally, recent efforts to reconcile reconceptualized curriculum theory with the historic field warrant consideration in light of these alternative historical perspectives.

THE STANDARD ACCOUNT

Available accounts of the reconceptualization of the curriculum field typically explain it in relation to important events and changing contours of the curriculum field and educational reform. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, for example, initially identified two developments in educational reform that signaled the "demise" of the traditional curriculum field. The first was the exclusion of curriculum specialists from leadership of the national reforms launched under the auspices of the National Science Foundation (NSF) during the 1960s. Pinar claimed that this "bypass was a kind of deathblow to a field whose primary justification was its expertise in an area now dominated by cognate-field specialists." Pinar and associates suggested that, by their exclusion from the NSF projects, traditional

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curriculum specialists lost credibility and ultimately were marginalized from mainstream curriculum reform.

Pinar and associates indicated that, during the 1970s, economic recession led to widespread educational retrenchment and established the conditions for the second development in the demise of the traditional curriculum field. Among the programs to suffer from financial constraint were inservice and curriculum development efforts. As Pinar put it, "A field whose professional status was irreparably damaged now lost the material basis necessary for its functioning." With the resources vital to school-based curriculum development gone, traditional curriculum specialists were removed further from practice.

Looking back from the mid-1990s, Pinar and associates added that these two developments, "coupled with declining enrollments, politically ascendant departments of educational administration and educational psychology, the replacement of retiring curriculum generalists with subject matter specialists (such as science educators), and the paradigm instability within the field itself (i.e., dissatisfaction over the Tyler rationale), sent the curriculum field into crisis." Collectively, according to this version of history, these conditions marginalized traditional curriculum specialists from school practice and established favorable conditions for a shift in focus from curriculum development to curriculum understanding. Further, Pinar and associates characterized the resulting reconceptualization as part of the "challenge to conventional ideas of American culture generally," pointing to the "self-critique" pursued by most social science specializations in the university that followed in the wake of the counter-culture movement of the 1960s. By the mid-1980s, Pinar confidently proclaimed the reconceptualization of the curriculum field complete.

Initially, the reconceptualization was preoccupied with "a comprehensive critique of the field as it is, a field immersed in pseudopractical, technical modes of understanding and action." This critique drew almost exclusively from European sources and denigrated

7 Ibid., p. 187.
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and dismissed the literature of the American field of curriculum. These sources hailed from "disparate traditions—Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis—whose common bond in the context of the curriculum field is their dissimilarity to the behaviorism and empiricism characteristic of American social science and educational research." The critique centered around a narrow, misleading interpretation of Tyler's rationale that depicted it as a top-down, technical-bureaucratic form of social engineering that silenced and oppressed the genuine voices of teachers and students. Thus depicted, Tyler was deemed representative of virtually the entire curriculum field prior to the reconceptualization. Early reconceptualist work sought "to repudiate the limiting instrumentality that they saw dominating curriculum theory and research." As Pinar put it, "To a considerable extent, the reconceptualization is a reaction to what the field has been."

More than a mere reaction, the early critique amounted to a sheer rejection of the traditional field. Central to this rejection was a commitment to distancing curriculum theory from school practice; concerns of school practitioners were to take a back seat to theoretical priorities of university professors. By the end of the 1970s, "attention shifted from a critique of the Tylerian tradition to reconceptualist themes themselves." During the 1980s and 1990s, political, racial, gender, postmodern, aesthetic, autobiographical, and theological approaches to curriculum theorizing came into their own. Particular emphasis fell on personal curriculum theorizing, which found its quintessential expression in Pinar's notion of currere as autobiographical method.

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11 W. Pinar and M. Grumet, "Theory and Practice and the Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies," in Rethinking Curriculum Studies, ed. M. Lawn and L. Barlor (New York: Halsted Press, 1981), p. 31. The term reconceptualist is used here recognizing that its suitability for representing the vast range of work it signifies is problematic. Because, however, the term was both coined and is still employed by reconceptualists themselves, it appears to be the appropriate term to use.
15 For early manifestations of this trend, see W. F. Pinar and M. Grumet, Toward a Poor Curriculum (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1976); for recent developments, see W. F. Pinar, W. M. Reynolds, P. Slattery, and P. M. Taubman, Understanding Curriculum (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).
This account of the origins of the curriculum reconceptualization is compelling, but problematic. It uncritically accepts popular midcentury criticisms of American schools and exaggerates the significance of the NSF reforms both to the separate subjects and to the wider curriculum field. Although school critics of the 1950s directed part of their attack at curriculum specialists, this attention was incidental in the larger context. Critics assaulted progressive education writ large. Importantly, most of these attacks were premised upon grossly exaggerated "straw men" that served as foils against which the critic's proposals would prevail. Wild overgeneralizations characterized attacks upon the schools and upon professional "educationalists." The antieducation sentiment manifest in the exclusion of educators from the advisory boards of the post-Sputnik reform efforts was directed at professional educators at large. To imply that curriculum specialists were the main target of such criticism simply overstates the case.

The discipline-centered NSF curriculum projects clearly represented a repudiation of approved practices in those subjects as well as in curriculum development. In their 1995 text, Pinar and associates recognized that interdisciplinary curriculums, the purposeful connection of the curriculum to the life of the learner, and substantive teacher participation were basic principles of curriculum development by the 1950s. The NSF projects did not employ these principles. Indeed, these projects ignored and ultimately undermined these principles. The demise of the NSF projects can be traced to their failure to apply approved practices of the curriculum field. The exclusion of curriculum professors from NSF reforms by policymakers and bureaucrats need not be viewed as a failure on the part of the former to exert their influence, but as a failure on the part of the latter to exercise sound judgment based upon research and experience in the curriculum field. Paradoxically, approved practices of the curriculum field, discredited by advocates of discipline-centered curriculums, were validated by the failure of the NSF projects. By the time this failure was apparent in the 1970s, much curriculum schol-

18During the heyday of the NSF reforms, Tyler issued such a warning; see R. W. Tyler, "The Interrelationship of Knowledge," The National Elementary Principal 43 (February 1964): 13–21.
arship had become increasingly unconcerned with such practical matters. Even then, however, other aspects of the rationale for the reconceptualization were more problematic than this interpretation of the meaning of the NSF reforms for the historic curriculum field.

OVERCOMING UNDESIRABLE TRADITIONS

The reconceptualist repudiation of the historic field rested largely upon Herbert Kliebard's interpretation of Ralph Tyler's *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* and of the early history of the curriculum field. Kliebard depicted the Tyler rationale as a "production model of curriculum" and as an outgrowth of the early field's alleged preoccupation with social efficiency and social control. Kliebard's writings were cited in key arguments favoring the reconceptualization and reprinted in influential anthologies. In early reconceptualization literature, Kliebard's interpretations were exalted at the exclusion of others. The purported paradigm shift in the curriculum field was legitimated solely on one of several available historical interpretations; other interpretations were not even critiqued. Given their importance to the reconceptualization, Kliebard's interpretations of Tyler and of the early history of the curriculum field warrant careful scrutiny.

**Tyler as Archetype**

Advocates of the reconceptualization routinely heralded the Tyler rationale as the archetype of the traditional field. Relying heavily on Kliebard's interpretation, they depicted the Tyler rationale as

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a "linear administrative procedure for curriculum development" designed to maintain the hegemonic existing social order. Kliebard's interpretation of Tyler's rationale went unchallenged until recently, when Hlebowitsh engaged Kliebard in a revealing debate about the meaning of the rationale. Hlebowitsh, for example, indicated that Tyler "noted that the Rationale need not be used in a step-wise or rigidly linear fashion" and quoted the closing paragraph of Tyler's book in the appendix to his article. Kliebard countered that the examples Tyler offered in the closing paragraph of his book all applied to the first question in the Rationale. In fact, Tyler's examples illustrated the first and fourth questions and included "concern of the staff [i.e., faculty]" as a starting point, which, obviously, encompasses all four questions. Further, in discussing the process of selecting educational purposes, Tyler noted, "However, it is true that in any process of development there is value in shuttling back and forth from one step to a preceding and subsequent step in the process." More telling, however, is Tyler's conception of curriculum evaluation and development as a problem-solving process.

Tyler proposed that once evaluation procedures revealed strengths and weaknesses of the educational program of a local school, educators properly should generate possible reasons for particular weaknesses. By treating the reasons as hypotheses to be

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28Ibid., p. 55; see also p. 56.
tested in the educational situation, problems relating to the nature or organization of educational experiences provided to students, or even relating to identified purposes, could be resolved. Through this kind of curriculum planning, “it is possible for the curriculum and instructional program to be continuously improved over the years.”

Tyler's conception of curriculum development as a problem-solving process bears striking resemblance to Dewey's similar notion.

Promoters of the reconceptualization also claimed that the Tyler rationale manifests managerial prerogatives that dominated the “traditional” curriculum field. Pinar and associates maintained that “the functionality of social efficiency asserted itself simply and forcefully in the Tyler Rationale.” They stated flatly, “The Tyler procedure is not a teacher's statement of curriculum development, it is a bureaucrat's.”

Hlebowitsh indicated that, in fact, Tyler generated his rationale in his work with the Eight-Year Study. That is, Tyler generated his rationale to help teachers think about curriculum in unconventional ways that could take them beyond the traditional discipline-centered curriculum. Recently, Snyder, Bolin, and Zumwalt identified three approaches to curriculum implementation that represent, in effect, a continuum of autocratic to democratic-participative forms of curriculum development: the fidelity approach, mutual adaptation, and curriculum enactment.

They cited the Eight-Year Study as a prime example of curriculum enactment. The Tyler rationale emerged from the most democratic and effective approach to curriculum improvement known to the field. Although the Tyler rationale—indeed, any rationale—certainly can be used in a top-down, autocratic fashion, it was neither designed nor destined for such use.

The Social Efficiency Thesis

Early reconceptualist accounts emphasized that the reconceptualization involved a rejection of the bureaucratic, managerial, and...
technical approach to curriculum that purportedly dominated the curriculum field to that time. Advocates of the reconceptualization continue to depict the historic curriculum field as preoccupied with bureaucratic, autocratic, and narrowly technical prerogatives that oppress teachers and students. Advocates of the reconceptualization associate the traditional curriculum field with an administrative concern for control and with an unwitting loyalty to the reproduction of the existing social order and all of its injustices and inequities. This perspective on the curriculum field was supported by Kliebard's interpretation that the field was born in an effort to promote social efficiency and social control through the agency of the school.

Kliebard cited 1918 as a fitting starting point of the curriculum field. During that year, Franklin Bobbitt's *The Curriculum*, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education's *Cardinal Principles* report, Alexander Inglis's *Principles of Secondary Education*, and William Kilpatrick's "The Project Method" were published. Kliebard suggested that although "Inglis' and Kilpatrick's [works] must be regarded essentially as works of individual genius, . . . Bobbitt's and the *Cardinal Principles* report were distinctive products of their time and their intellectual and social milieu." Kliebard proceeded by associating the origins of the field in the second and third decades of this century exclusively with the ideology of social efficiency—social control that he claimed was advocated by Bobbitt and the Commission. He suggested that progressive ideas, such as those evident in the work of Kilpatrick and Inglis, did not emerge until the 1930s in the work of curriculum scholars such as Hollis Caswell and L. Thomas Hopkins. In his early work that informed the reconceptualization, Kliebard stressed the social efficiency elements and de-emphasized the work of the progressive branch of the field.

This interpretation of the early history of the curriculum field is problematic, at best, and inaccurate, at worst. First, both Inglis and

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Kilpatrick were members of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education. Both served, along with Chessman Herrick, on the reviewing committee that approved the final draft of the *Cardinal Principles* report. Ideas expressed in the 1918 works of Inglis and Kilpatrick, furthermore, are evident in the *Cardinal Principles* report. In fact, the main ideas in the *Cardinal Principles* report and in Inglis's *Principles of Secondary Education* are nearly identical. The influence of progressive curriculum ideas appears to have been greater than Kliebard estimated.

In fact, important work of progressive curriculum professors was well under way between 1900 and 1930, the formative years of the curriculum field. In addition to Dewey at the University of Chicago Laboratory School, two others—Junius Meriam at the laboratory schools of the University of Missouri and Frederick Bonser at the experimental Speyer School affiliated with Teachers College, Columbia University—enjoyed prominence in their day and laid vital foundations for the progressive curriculum development projects on the secondary level during the 1930s. With the exception of Dewey's work, these and other contemporary efforts have received scant attention from curriculum historians.

If the social efficiency—social control branch truly dominated the curriculum field during its formative years, this dominance likely would be apparent in the famous "composite" statement of the National Society for the Study of Education's Committee on Curriculum-Making. The influence of Charters and Bobbitt on the document, however apparent, does not dominate. Finding the position of none of the four interest groups he articulated pronounced in the document, Kliebard denigrated the statement as "bland." Apparently, the influence of the social efficiency—social control branch of the field

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was insufficient to sway other members of the Committee during the heyday of the social efficiency movement.42

Evidence suggests, furthermore, that scientific management practices associated with Taylorism had greater influence on the field of educational administration than on the fields of curriculum and supervision. Callahan and Button, for example, suggested that scientific management practices popular in the field of educational administration enjoyed considerably less influence in the field of supervision because of the important connection of supervision with the improvement of curriculum.43 Building upon the work of Callahan and Button, Pajak noted that the “field of supervision distinguished itself from administration during the 1930s,” instead allying itself with curriculum. This alliance resulted in the marriage of the two fields in the 1943 founding of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. “From 1943 to the early 1960s,” Pajak continued, “writers on supervision clarified and elaborated on the concept of democratic educational leadership.”

The literature of the curriculum field yields a similar commitment to democratic forms of educational leadership and of curriculum development. Bonser, for example, claimed that when developing curriculum, each teacher “should be given the widest possible opportunities to work along lines in which she feels the greatest interest and in which she has the most to give. The organization of the work should be thoroughly democratic,” he concluded. Relatively, Bonser asserted that “the curriculum must grow as a really living thing and the teachers must grow with it, if it is to be effective.”45

The Committee on Curriculum-Making wrote that it “heartily commends the practice of releasing efficient teachers from active class work to participate in the study of the content and organization of


the curriculum materials within their chosen fields of work. Caswell and Campbell declared that "every teacher is a curriculum maker." They concluded that "an effective curriculum program, then, should provide for extensive participation by all teachers and representative lay groups." L. Thomas Hopkins, whose interest in curriculum was inspired by his Harvard teacher Alexander Inglis, characterized the teacher's role as follows:

The teacher guides pupils and parents in selecting needs to be studied and in planning well-rounded programs of living. As a guide, he is not one apart who gives directions. He is a participating member of the group, the same as any other person.

This commitment to democratic forms of curriculum development, which first appeared during the height of interest in social efficiency, is conspicuously absent from accounts of curriculum history portrayed by Kliebard, Pinar, and others and is obscured by the prevailing social efficiency–social control thesis. To contend that the curriculum field simply "began in administrative convenience, not in intellectual necessity" also ignores two decades of curriculum work that predated Jesse Newlon's work in Denver. Such a contention obscures the details of the Denver curriculum development project as well. Suggesting that the curriculum field emerged as a mere ad-

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ministrative convenience is tantamount to asserting that affirmative action was born in a bureaucratic act.\textsuperscript{50}

The neglect of the progressive branch of the curriculum field in prevailing historical accounts may well rest on an apparently calculated overemphasis placed upon the social efficiency branch of the field by some curriculum historians. In addition to Kliebard, Apple and Franklin also concentrated on the social efficiency thesis. Apple, for example, took the same tack as Kliebard when he wrote in an explanatory note:

I have selected these individuals [Franklin Bobbitt, W. W. Charters, Edward L. Thorndike, Ross L. Finney, Charles S. Peters, David Snedden] as the most important formative members of the curriculum field because I believe that their identification with the social efficiency movement and a behavioristic psychology place them in the mainstream of the field. I am not including John Dewey and others identified with child-centered education and the child's needs/interest tradition. Although their ideas are interesting and important, they had little impact on either the curriculum field as it developed or for that matter on school practice.\textsuperscript{51}

Franklin noted that scholars used the notion of social control to explain "the historic failure of American public schools to live up to their promise of promoting individual opportunity and building a more equal society." They found, instead, "that in truth American education was never designed to achieve egalitarian ends," but rather to maintain the existing social order.\textsuperscript{52} Franklin applied the concept of social control to an analysis of the early curriculum field, maintaining that the task of the curriculum historian is "at the least to uncover but hopefully to overcome the field's undesirable tradi-


Like Apple, Franklin studied only those aspects of the curriculum field that fit the social control thesis. In these accounts, the labors of progressive curricularists are obscured. In effect, a chapter of curriculum history remains only partially written.

At least one explanation of this situation seems plausible. Historical research, of course, is in part a product of its time. Curriculum history written during the late 1960s and 1970s perhaps reflects the disillusionment with traditional institutions that pervaded American culture at the time. Curriculum historians seem inadvertently to have projected their dissatisfaction with contemporary developments in educational reform on their analysis of events of the past.

Curriculum historians writing in the late 1960s and 1970s often expressly tied their critique of the curriculum past to events of the curriculum present. Kliebard, for example, focused on the role of objectives as conceived by Franklin Bobbitt and later, according to Kliebard, by Ralph Tyler, and discerned similar notions in the “systems analysis approach” popular at the time of his writing. In another instance, Kliebard traced the origins of bureaucracy in curriculum theory from the works of Frederick Taylor to the work of Franklin Bobbitt, W. W. Charters, and David Snedden as a preface to his criticism of W. James Popham’s highly mechanistic system of determining behavioral objectives popular at the time of his writing. Franklin, too, revealed the deficiency of “accountability, competency-based education, and the behavioral objectives movement” during the 1970s by exposing technological models of curriculum construction advanced by Bobbitt, Charters, Peters, and Snedden.

For Kliebard and Franklin, history illuminated contemporary curriculum issues. In each of these cases, however, the bulk and brunt of the historians’ criticisms were leveled at the curriculum past, not at the curriculum present. Their dissatisfaction with contemporary curriculum reform was vented on past curriculum reform. Much of their

criticism appears valid for both present and past issues. Nevertheless, their preoccupation with manifestations of technocratic social-efficiency curriculum resulted in a profile of the origins of the curriculum field that exaggerated the work of one branch of the field and minimized the work of another branch. As historians drew direct connections between the 1920s and the 1970s, they effectively ignored work of progressive curriculum professors prior to the 1930s, as well as during intervening decades. Whatever the reasons for this unbalanced treatment of the history of the field, its effect has been to support the repudiation of the traditional curriculum field as part of the reconceptualization project.

The Paradigm Shift

Advocates of the reconceptualization also invoked Kuhn's conception of paradigmatic change in the history of science to explain their actions. Pinar and associates, for example, employed the term cautiously but effectively in their synoptic textbook of reconceptualized curriculum theory. At one point they explained that they used the term paradigm "in a non-specialized, non-Kuhnian, simple dictionary sense of the word" to characterize the Tyler rationale as the typical mode of thinking of the "traditional field." They cautiously suggested that "the curriculum field has experienced a paradigm shift similar, for example, to that undergone in the humanities during the previous two decades." A few pages later, they claimed that "the use of the term paradigm seems to us not entirely unreasonable to refer to the Reconceptualization." Later, however, they asserted definitively that during the 1970s "a weakened [curriculum] field would undergo the cataclysm known as "paradigm shift,"" citing Kuhn. This subtle escalation of the meaning of the term paradigm is remarkable.

Pinar and associates were sensitive to the limitations of using a construct intended to explain changes in the "hard" sciences to describe events in the social sciences and the humanities, at least at the outset of their book. Brown also revealed the limitations of the term in describing changes in the curriculum field. Brown con-
ceded that "a dramatically new formulation of the curriculum field does appear to exist, have its advocates and adherents, and manifest itself at least partially along generational lines." He wondered, however, whether there existed "any real evidence that these are signs of paradigm succession rather than the proliferation of schools" of thought. This concern, however, is only part of the problem with the paradigm thesis.

At least one important contrast between Kuhn's conception of paradigmatic change and the reconceptualization of the curriculum field seems particularly critical. In the examples of paradigm change in the sciences that Kuhn cited (in the contributions of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Lavoisier, and Einstein, for example), although the laws, theories, applications, and even instrumentation of a particular field changed dramatically and profoundly, the phenomena under study remained the same. Describing "the scientist who embraces a new paradigm," Kuhn noted, "Confronting the same constellation of objects as before and knowing that he does so, he nevertheless finds them transformed through and through in many of their details." This condition was not exclusively the case in the reconceptualization of the curriculum field. As reconceptualized curriculum theory conceived of curriculum expansively not only as transcending school experience, but, even, as encompassing virtually any aspect of the human condition, it departed from the curriculum field not only in theoretical terms, but in terms of the phenomena to be studied. Theory was not merely brought into the curriculum field from other academic fields, but phenomena outside the field were regarded as appropriate subjects for curriculum inquiry. Reconceptualists often cast their gaze on an entirely different "constellation of objects." Theorists of reconceptualized curriculum, in effect, left the curriculum field in pursuit of new subjects to study.

Even as partial explanations of the reconceptualization of the curriculum field, the social efficiency interpretations of the history of the curriculum field and of the Tyler rationale, as well as Kuhn's notion of paradigmatic change, remain highly problematic. The reconceptualization is based upon a selective account of the past that privileges the reconceptualist agenda as it defers the whole truth of the history of the curriculum field. In short, despite criticisms of the traditional field as ahistorical and despite express commitments to

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64 Ibid.: 12.
opening a dialog with the past, reconceptualized curriculum history has been susceptible to its own brand of historical presentism. Because the rejection of the traditional field was based upon a narrow interpretation of the origins of the curriculum field and because Kuhn's concept of paradigmatic change has limited applications to the curriculum field, key assumptions upon which the reconceptualization rested are not only inaccurate but also inadequate to explain the tumultuous changes in curriculum studies that occurred during the 1970s.

TOWARD NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE RECONCEPTUALIZATION

Historic events, of course, are too complex to reduce accurately to a single interpretation or even to just several interpretations, particularly when those interpretations fail to take full account of the available historical record. Multiple interpretations are necessary to approximate a satisfactory reconstruction of the causes and consequences of human actions. Thus, the reconceptualization seems better understood from at least three additional perspectives: (1) as a reflection of pervading trends in contemporary American social thought, (2) as "interesting social theory," and (3) as an "interpersonal-affiliative phenomenon."

Reflection of Contemporary Social Thought

As noted earlier, most accounts of the reconceptualization limit consideration of context to the history of the curriculum field and its relation to educational reform. At best, they associate the reconceptualization with the counter-culture movement of the 1960s. Brown acknowledged, however, that external forces, such as "changed cultural values," also can influence the internal dynamics of an academic field. Indeed, elements of the reconceptualization reflected broad trends in American society and culture.

William H. White, for example, articulated two "dominant conditions" that prevailed in American social thought around the 1980 presidential campaign. He called these conditions "the National Humilia-

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American pride suffered a series of international embarrassments: losing a protracted war in Southeast Asia, being held hostage figuratively by Middle Eastern oil moguls and, in 1979, literally by the fanaticism of the Iranian Revolution. The Watergate scandal, as well, deflated American pride. Inflation had been climbing since the late 1960s and in 1980 reached an alarming 18 percent. These combined psychic and fiscal failings resulted in a profound disillusionment with traditional institutions.

In the context of these conditions, the reconceptualization of the curriculum field can be understood in part as a manifestation of pervasive disillusionment with traditional institutions. Initially, the reconceptualization involved a repudiation of the traditional field. Advocates continue to characterize the history of the movement as a revolt against the traditional field. Looking back on the conflict between the "traditionalists" and the "reconceptualists," a conflict often cast in generational terms, Pinar and associates noted, "Nor did we rebels—would-be revolutionaries—ask for the microphone politely."^69

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. characterized historical cycles in the United States "as a continuing shift in national involvement, between public purpose and private interest."^70 Describing the impact of the tumultuous events of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Schlesinger suggested, "So much trauma compressed in so short a time produced national disillusion and exhaustion. . . . By the later 1970s," he continued, "Americans were once more, as they had been in the 1950s and the 1920s, fed up with public action and disenchanted by its consequences." Schlesinger concluded, "The compass needle now swung toward private interest and the fulfillment of the self."^71 During this time period, the reconceptualization retreated from the historic commitment of curriculum scholars to the resolution of the practical problems of public schools. While political analysis of the curriculum, emerging from the social milieu of the late 1960s, thrived under the reconceptualization and may be said to reflect a concern with public issues, much reconceptualized curriculum theorizing turned inward and away from the public arena of practice. Personal curriculum theorizing was often exalted over engagement with developing curriculum in the public setting of schools.

^71Ibid., p. 32.
Theorists of reconceptualized curriculum often conceived of "curriculum" in the broadest possible sense, encompassing the course of one's life experience. As noted, under this expansive conception of curriculum, virtually any phenomenon qualified as subject matter for curriculum inquiry. A scholar's life history became an appropriate, even necessary, subject for curriculum contemplation. Personal curriculum theorizing and self-psychoanalysis emerged as accepted forms of curriculum inquiry.

The legitimization of introspection and autobiographical method, coupled with the deemphasis of the resolution of practical curriculum problems as they existed in public schools, reflects the retreat from "public action" and the preoccupation with "private interest and the fulfillment of the self" that Schlesinger perceived in American social thought in the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, Pinar depicted the public school experience as "devastating" to the self. In effect, the public and private spheres of understanding and action were seen even as incompatible and antagonistic. At best, individual "situations" could only be improved by first fulfilling our "selves," though ultimately, we "write autobiography for ourselves," rather than for the social good. Curriculum inquiry, according to this formula, became a form of personal therapy.

This emphasis on curriculum inquiry as a form of therapeutic introspection reflects aspects of "the culture of narcissism" articulated by Christopher Lasch. Like Schlesinger, Lasch observed that "after the political turmoil of the sixties, Americans have retreated to purely personal preoccupations." Finding "a meaning in life" became the priority of "the new narcissist." Lasch also observed that "we are fast losing the sense of historical continuity, the sense of belonging to a succession of generations originating in the past and...

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77Ibid., p. 29.

78Ibid., p. 22.
stretching into the future." Early representations of the reconceptualization that held the historic field in contempt reflected the "cultural devaluation of the past" that Lasch lamented.

"Interesting Social Theory"

The reconceptualization can also be understood as an example of what M. S. Davis called "interesting social theory." Based on his examination of dozens of famous sociological theories, Davis concluded that an interesting proposition was one which attempted first to expose the ontological claim of its accredited counterpart as merely phenomenological pretense, and then to deny this phenomenological pretense with its own claim to ontological priority. In brief, an interesting proposition was always the negation of an accepted one.

A theory is interesting to a particular academic audience when "it stands out in their attention in contrast to the web of routinely taken-for-granted propositions which make up the theoretical structure of their everyday life." Davis emphasized that the revelation of a new truth is an unnecessary criterion for a social theory to be interesting. Simply, "a new theory will be noticed only when it denies an old truth." Davis advised, "A theorist is considered great, not because his theories are true, but because they are interesting." Davis found that interesting social theories were often advanced by a technique he called "Consensus Creation." Consensus Creation involves the "rhetorical technique of integrating all of the assumptions which are to be refuted into a single (wrong) assumption of the 'other side.'" Consensus Creation usually involves depicting "a few representative writers" as "saying essentially the same thing.

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79 Ibid., p. 30. Students in the spring 1997 section of Curriculum Theory at the University of Georgia observed that this repudiation of the historic curriculum field is inconsistent with postmodern theory that conceives of history as "a processive experience of interrelated occasions with the past and future embedded in the exist- tential present reality." See P. Slattery, Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era (New York: Garland, 1995), p. 35.


81 Ibid.: 313.

82 Ibid.: 311.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.: 309.

85 Ibid.: 332.
about a particular topic." Such a depiction often amounts to a mis-
representation of the targeted assumptions. Once a theoretical tradi-
tion is depicted in this manner, the writer "adduces one or more 
propositions which deny what has been traditionally assumed." 
Next, the theorist proves using "various methodological devices that 
the old routinely assumed propositions are wrong while the new 
ones . . . are right." Finally, "he suggests the practical consequences 
of these new propositions for . . . ongoing social research, specifi-
cally how they ought to deflect onto new paths."

The parallels between Davis's concepts of "Consensus Creation" 
and "Interesting Social Theory" and the reconceptualization of the 
curriculum field are striking. Proponents of the reconceptualization 
depicted Bobbitt, Charters, and Tyler as in agreement about the ways 
and means of curriculum construction and presented this contrived 
position as representative of all curriculum work prior to the 1970s. 
Tyler, of course, served as the archetype of this "undesirable tradi-
tion." Opponents of this tradition then denied the belief that curricu-
lum developers had contributed to the progressive improvement of 
schools as an instrument of enlightened democratic policy and prac-
tice and argued that, in truth, the opposite was the case. The notion 
of social control as elucidated by Franklin and other curriculum his-
torians, Kuhn's theory of paradigmatic change, and later the post-
modern critique of modernism served as the methodological or con-
ceptual devices that discredited the accepted assumption of social 
progress resulting from curriculum development endeavors. Finally,
champions of the reconceptualization prescribed a subsequent 
agenda focused not on curriculum development but on curriculum 
understanding as a necessary palliative for the otherwise terminally 
"moribund" curriculum field. Although this brief sketch oversimplifies 
the facts of the case, the truth of the general analogy holds firm.

An "Interpersonal-Affiliative" Phenomenon

Early in the reconceptualization movement, Pinar took pains to 
insist that the "reconceptualization, it must be noted, is fundamen-

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[86] Ibid.: 333.
[87] Ibid.: 312. The technique of Consensus Creation has (incomplete) parallels in 
the following formula that Turner detected in postmodern art: "first, the subversion 
of the traditional means of representation, which are held to serve the interests of 
the power elite; next, what poststructuralist critics call 'the play of signifiers,' 
designed to undermine the expectations of the public; finally, the reminder that the 
sucker who buys the thing is complicit in the fraud described by the fashion mag-
azines as the late capitalist commodification of desire." See F. Turner, "The Free-
tally an intellectual phenomenon, not an interpersonal-affiliative one.” Pinar based this disclaimer largely on the fact that, at the time, reconceptualists had “no organized group, such as ASCD or AERA.” Yet the so-called reconceptualists held an annual conference (the Bergamo Conference) and established a journal (The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing) as forums for their views. The AERA Critical Issues in Curriculum SIG (founded in 1973 under the name Creation and Utilization of Curriculum Knowledge) also served as a forum for theoretical curriculum inquiries. These developments powerfully attest that the reconceptualization can be understood as an “interpersonal-affiliative” movement.

Viewed in a wider context, the interpersonal-affiliative aspect of reconceptualized curriculum theory raises thorny issues of academic identity and institutional affiliation. Given the dramatic departures of reconceptualized curriculum theory from historic commitments, the principal resemblance between the historic and the reconceptualized curriculum field seems to reside mainly in the continued, though strained, use of the term curriculum. One way to grasp the profound difference between the historic and reconceptualized approaches to the study of curriculum is to substitute the term human condition or existence for the word curriculum in reconceptualized literature. Significantly, with this substitution, the substance and meaning of much reconceptualized curriculum theorizing is unchanged. Given its continuing affiliation with institutional aspects of curriculum scholarship despite its resounding repudiation of definitive historic commitments of the field, reconceptualized curriculum theory perhaps is best characterized as being in the curriculum field, but not of it.

FROM REPUDIATION TO RECONCILIATION

As adherents of reconceptualized curriculum theory increased in number over the last 20 years, especially among the rising generation of curriculum scholars, reconceptualized curriculum studies acquired prominence in academic curriculum circles. Now, reconceptualized curriculum theory dominates the program of Division B of AERA and annually appears more frequently on the program of the Professors of Curriculum meetings, especially those held at AERA. The recent publication of two notable textbooks in this area likely will further the promotion of the reconceptualization. Many of the foundational assumptions of the reconceptualization, especially the rejection of

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the Tyler rationale, remain as the bedrock of recent reconceptualized curriculum theorizing. Yet emerging signs of subtle shifts on some positions point to an apparent attempt to reconcile reconceptualized curriculum theory with the historic curriculum field.

Faint signs of reconciliation may well be evident in the sometimes cautious use of Kuhn's theory of paradigmatic change to characterize the reconceptualization and in the recognition of some "desirable" practices in progressive curriculum development, such as the necessary involvement of teachers in curriculum development and the generation of interdisciplinary patterns of curriculum organization. The increasing interest in the implications of reconceptualized curriculum theory for school practice may portend reconciliation, as well, although this development is fraught with problems that stem from a failure of the reconceptualists to build upon past practice and a propensity to coopt progressive curriculum practices in the name of postmodernism.

Most striking, however, is an effort by Pinar and associates to give the appearance that reconceptualized curriculum theorists actually work within important traditions of the historic field. In *Understanding Curriculum*, for example, after a discussion of social reconstructionism of the 1930s, the authors suggested that "curriculum as political text, its major theoretical antecedent being the work of Counts, constitutes a major contemporary curriculum discourse, as we shall see in chapter 5." They also asserted that Counts's work "foreshadowed" criticism of the Tyler rationale during the 1970s. Similarly, after discussing Margaret Naumberg's critique of Dewey's social theory, the authors claimed that "a therapeutic notion of education would resurface in the alternative schools movement of the 1960s." Further, Horace Mann Bond's work on the education of African Americans "foreshadowed the establishment in the 1990s of race as a central curriculum discourse." They associated progressive educators as a group with later work when the authors described them as "courageous and committed to the reconceptualization of American education." In short, Pinar and associates seem to have made a concerted effort to depict reconceptualized curriculum theory as a part of rather than apart from the historic field.

To overstate these signs of reconciliation, however, would be to err. They are undermined, for example, by continuing impolite

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90Ibid., pp. 20, 83, 105, 155–156.
requests for the microphone, such as this reconceptualist mandate to include literature about curriculum understanding in courses devoted to curriculum development: "To ignore poststructuralism, for instance, is little different than censorship, little different from an old Soviet-style refusal to report world news, simply because the Party insisted on its version of what reality was."\textsuperscript{93} More important, the reconceptualized position still exalts theoretical and even ideological concerns over practical problems.

A substantive reconciliation of reconceptualized curriculum theory with the mainstream field will require coming to terms with the historically problematic assumptions upon which the reconceptualization rests. Alternative explanations of the reconceptualization warrant examination. Ultimately, however, reconciliation will depend upon the extent to which reconceptualized curriculum theory builds upon the professional knowledge of the historic field and contributes to the ongoing resolution of practical curriculum problems that face our schools. That such a reconciliation is possible without the eventual repudiation of definitive reconceptualist (mis)-representations of the curriculum past seems unlikely.

\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., p. 9.