

A Research Agenda

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF CURRICULUM INQUIRY

JOHN I. GOODLAD, *University of Washington*

William A. Reid's article on the agenda for research in curriculum brought my attention back to Francis Cornford's humorous, insightful essay on aspects of academic life.¹ "The Great World," he says, was "a distant and rather terrifying region, which it is very necessary to keep in touch with, though it must not be allowed on any account to touch you."²

Cornford's words brought back to mind also the painfully critical review of *Curriculum Inquiry: The Study of Curriculum Practice* by a former education editor of *The Christian Science Monitor*.³ She had been over the years an ardent supporter of my work, a circumstance that made her critique all the more discomfiting. Actually, the book was less put down than put aside. She simply did not understand it, she said, before taking off on a biting query into why academicians remove themselves from the world of practice for which their work is to have some relevance. She saw no relationship between the chapters of the book and the encounters with the curriculum of real teachers and real children—even though the several authors purported to address practice. My admonitions that the book was intended for students of curriculum only exacerbated her negative views.

The reflections I have had over the past decade on this episode have not gone well with me. Nor have educational research and curriculum inquiry. Reid's article helped me to understand why. "Education as practice will survive," he says, drawing from MacIntyre,⁴ "only with the greatest difficulty if it is not in some sense institutionalized."⁵ If practice is to be enlightened by

¹William A. Reid, "The Institutional Context of Curriculum Deliberation," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 4 (Fall 1988): 10.

²Francis M. Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica. Being a Guide for the Young Academic Politician* (Cambridge, MA: Bowes & Bowes, 1908), p. 8.

³John I. Goodlad and Associates, *Curriculum Inquiry: The Study of Curriculum Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

⁴Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 181.

⁵William A. Reid, "The Institutional Context of Curriculum Deliberation," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 4 (Fall 1988): 13.

research—Dewey's test of value of all research⁶—then must we not also institutionalize research and the results of research?⁷ But in what institution or institutions?

The academic theorist-researcher might well reply: in the university, of course. Conducting research is well institutionalized in the university; certainly the university should make continuing use of all relevant research in the spirit of "Physician, heal thyself." But neither the canons of inquiry nor its fruits should be confined to the orchards of academe. Universities are supported and justified on the basis of their public significance. Contemplation of the institutional navel is warranted only to the degree that it adds to a university's ability to serve the public interest. When top administrators of the University of California proudly reported the high comparative rankings of its several professional schools, Governor Jerry Brown was not impressed. "These represent merely the views of peers," he said. "I will take notice when there is clear evidence of the constructive role of the University's professional schools in the vital problems of the state, nation, and world."

We often say that a university exists for the faculty. Surely this comment is merely shorthand for saying that the infrastructure must ensure conditions that support faculty productivity. Nothing is institutionally unique here. Forward-looking corporations say precisely the same thing. Productive workers produce the black bottom line. With the bottom line not so clear, universities have difficulty knowing what conditions support faculty work of public significance and what conditions merely support the faculty.

The test of public significance for curriculum inquiry is the extent to which it enters into the reflections, deliberations, actions, and justifications of those who educate in homes, schools, religious institutions, and the media.⁷ The critic charged that *Curriculum Inquiry* did not meet the test. The preoccupation of students of curriculum with worn-out commonplaces detached from practice has contributed significantly to the conclusion by others that the field is moribund. The criticism came from within, not outside, the academy.⁸ The remedy, these critics and others have argued in recent years, is to connect curriculum research and theorizing to the real world—to the contents of students' learning in schools, to the practical.

Grounding curriculum work in the real world does not mean, however, directing the agenda only to the curricular decisions of educators and policy-makers and neglecting the cumulative conclusions of sustained inquiry. Both are of public significance.⁹ Nor should we turn away from theorizing. But we

⁶John Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), p. 33.

⁷William A. Reid, *Thinking about the Curriculum: The Nature and Treatment of Curriculum Problems* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁸For example, Joseph J. Schwab, *The Practical: A Language for Curriculum* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1970).

⁹Lee J. Cronbach and Patrick Suppes, eds., *Research for Tomorrow's Schools: Disciplined Inquiry for Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

must draw back from the kind of metatheorizing that builds on itself from within, of which Schwab was so critical, and that excludes, commonly, the moral dimensions inherent in all human action.¹⁰ To the degree that institutionalizing curriculum theorizing is confined within and directed to the academy, it will become increasingly devoid of moral content and, therefore, decreasingly practical.

RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION

Two turns in the history of schools of education, where the study of curriculum is usually lodged, have taken curriculum inquiry from Cornford's Great World to a more wonderful world considerably removed from practice generally and from institutional and organizational idiosyncrasy particularly.¹¹ One was their imitation of the arts and sciences departments, not professional schools. The other was how educational research arose. The effects of both were exacerbated by the low status attached to schoolteaching and the associated relegation of teacher education to the periphery of campus life in the development of universities and schools of education, especially in the flagship and major public and private institutions.

Early in this century, the ever-prescient John Dewey urged the newly emerging schools and colleges of education to seek lessons from "the matured experience" of other professional callings.¹² Unlike law, medicine, dentistry, and business, for example, education chose the B.S. and B.A. degrees of the arts and sciences and then, at the advanced levels, gave more status to the Ph.D. than to its own professional degree, the Ed.D.¹³ Unlike some of the more mature professional schools, colleges of education made little progress toward legitimating in the academic reward system either the clinical, practice side of educating or the nonquantified studies of practice.¹⁴ They appear not to have tried very hard. This practical research was not perceived as the model likely to lead to full membership among the disciplines. But unlike the more coherent subjects of the arts and sciences, the splintered fields of knowledge grouped under the rubric of education failed to laminate into a discipline. Education failed to become in all but a few universities either a strong

¹⁰Joseph J. Schwab, *The Practical. A Language for Curriculum* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1970).

¹¹Robert Donmoyer, "Theory, Practice, and the Double-edged Problem of Idiosyncrasy," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 4 (Spring 1989): 257-270.

¹²John Dewey, "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education," in *The Relation of Theory to Practice in the Education of Teachers*, ed. Charles A. McMurtry, Third Yearbook of the National Society for the Scientific Study of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904), p. 10.

¹³Geraldine J. Clifford and James W. Guthrie, *Ed School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁴University-wide Program Review Committee for Education, "The Role of the University of California in Precollegiate Education" (Berkeley: Administration Office, University of California, 1984).

professional school closely linked to practice or a respected discipline in the humanities or social sciences.¹⁵ In rejecting the Clifford-Guthrie preference for the former, Clark foresees for the future of schools and colleges of education only continued muddling along with ambiguous and conflicting missions.¹⁶ Envisioning the contours of a vigorous field of curriculum with a clear agenda emerging out of such a context is difficult.

The pull of schools of education toward scientific research, particularly in psychology with individuals as the units of analysis, during the second half of this century is understandable. It fit not only the ethos of 20th-century America but also the value the university community increasingly placed on scientific knowledge.¹⁷ Unlike the early 20th-century surge in medical research, the guiding theory was designed to control practice, not to check or validate it. Donmoyer subsumes under control-oriented curriculum theory much of the curriculum inquiry and development of the 1950s and beyond: the so-called Tyler rationale, the precise delineation of behavioral objectives, teacher-proof curriculums, and evaluation geared to behaviorally stated objectives.¹⁸ Johnson points out, "As education professors attempted to establish academic credentials and forge academic careers, their research became more and more methodologically sophisticated and thereby less and less accessible to practitioners."¹⁹

A RECOMMENDED AGENDA

How does this history speak to a research agenda for curriculum? At least three directions emerge. First, curriculum theorists must raise their own institutions' level of consciousness about fundamental principles in the curriculum development processes. "Do as I do" must replace "Do as I say" in the models provided in educators' preparation programs. Second, curriculum researchers must align themselves with curriculum decision makers in other educational institutions. This is to avoid the bloodlessness of metatheorizing. Third, curriculum inquirers must study actors, actions, and the consequences of actions in natural settings. Only then will their theorizing take account of the moral dimensions of curriculum making that characterize all real-life settings, regardless of the idiosyncratic nature of individuals and organizations. Exemplary work in this third domain particularly promises public significance.

¹⁵Geraldine J. Clifford and James W. Guthrie, *Ed School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁶Burton R. Clark, "Schools of Education: The Academic Professional Seesaw," *Change* 21 (January/February 1989): 62.

¹⁷John I. Goodlad, *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), chap. 2.

¹⁸Robert Donmoyer, "Theory, Practice, and the Double-edged Problem of Idiosyncrasy," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 4 (Spring 1989): 258, 263.

¹⁹William R. Johnson, "Teachers and Teacher Training in the Twentieth Century," in *American Teachers. Histories of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan, 1989), p. 244.

What paths lead in these directions? First, teacher-education curriculums offer a case in point. Most programs include both general and specific subject-oriented courses in curriculum planning. But these courses are inserted into programs that have no overall coherence and violate the principles presumably being taught.²⁰ There appears to be no clear mission tied to a conception of immediate and ideal expectations for future teachers in a democratic society, no agreed-upon organizing elements running through the length of the curriculum, and little connecting of organizing centers, therefore, to ensure continuity.²¹ Curriculums are made up primarily of courses extracted from such fields as educational history, philosophy (very little these days²²), psychology, and from curriculum and evaluation, all tacked together to meet certification requirements but with little cohesion.²³ If curriculum theorist-researchers have something of public significance to contribute, the curriculums that they and their colleagues are responsible for should be exemplary and on public display.

Second, general theorists in curriculum have not been highly visible in curriculum reform or, for that matter, in relatively large-scale, long-term efforts to redesign institutional curriculums. Years ago, the work of a few giants in such research and development stood out: Tyler's in the Eight-Year Study, Caswell's in states such as Virginia, and Taba's in Yolo and Contra Costa Counties, California.²⁴ But with a few exceptions—most notably Schwab's role in the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS)²⁵—the major theoretical components of the curriculum reform projects of the 1960s were provided by another psychologist, Jerome Bruner (and, of course, worldwide by another psychologist, Jean Piaget).²⁶ Curriculum specialists stayed largely on the sidelines, sometimes as critics.

Once again, there is considerable interest in the K-12 curriculum (although this is more diffused and suffers from financial malnutrition). Curricu-

²⁰Kenneth R. Howey and Nancy L. Zimpher, *Profiles of Preservice Teacher Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

²¹Hilda Taba, *Curriculum Development. Theory and Practice* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1962); Virgil E. Herrick, "Organizing Centers," in *Strategies of Curriculum Development (Selected Writings of the Late V. E. Herrick)*, ed. James B. Macdonald, Dan W. Anderson, and Frank B. May (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1965), pp. 107-113.

²²Kenneth A. Sirotnik, "On the Eroding Foundations of Teacher Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* 71 (May 1990): 710-716.

²³John I. Goodlad, *Teachers for Our Nation's Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), chap. 7.

²⁴Wilford M. Aikin, *The Story of the Eight-Year Study* (New York: Harper & Row, 1942); Hollis L. Caswell and Associates, *Curriculum Improvement in Public School Systems* (New York: Bureau of Publication, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1950); Hilda Taba, Elizabeth Hall Brady, and John T. Robinson, *Intergroup Education in Public Schools* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1952).

²⁵See John I. Goodlad, *School Curriculum Reform in the United States* (New York: Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1964), pp. 25-28.

²⁶Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), see particularly Jean Piaget, *Judgment and Reasoning in the Child* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962).

lum specialists in mathematics, the natural and social sciences, and the humanities are more active players this time around, but the big hitters, especially in garnering federal grants, are still largely specialists in the academic disciplines. It is very much in the public interest for the two groups to be joined in common projects—and very much in the interest of vital curriculum theory. If curriculum theory is, indeed, moribund, the villain is dry rot from within, not murderous attacks from without.

Regarding the third direction—the study of curriculum action in natural settings—the 1980s witnessed studies of schools that helped legitimate such inquiry generally.²⁷ What we saw less of were long-term associations of researchers and other educators in school settings reflectively working together in reconstructing curriculums and deriving principles of more general use. But the rhetoric for such is currently stronger than it has been for decades. The proposed professional development schools and school-university partnerships are still more of talk than reality, but there are clear signs of serious intentions.²⁸ The university reward system must broaden, however, if these are to become widespread reality.²⁹

Dewey admonishes educational researchers to carry into the study of educational practice the big ideas that constitute the source of intellectual supplies. A researcher without working hypotheses is likely "to occupy himself with isolated and relatively trivial problems, a kind of scientific 'busy-work,' and yet may expect his results to be taken seriously by workers in the field."³⁰ Reid reminds us that, without participating in the Great World of politics, government, interest groups, and the functioning of national institutions, we are likely to be devoid of big ideas and, as a result, find ourselves confined to the little league.³¹ The agenda I propose is intended to ensure that we play in fields occupied by major league players. The trade-off is that we must give up some of that wonderful world of curriculum imagining in order to do work of public significance.

JOHN I. GOODLAD is Professor of Education and Director, Center for Educational Renewal, College of Education, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195

²⁷For example, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Theodore R.Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); Linda M. McNeil, *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

²⁸Frank Brainerd, *Professional Development Schools: Status as of 1989*, Occasional Paper No 9 (Seattle: Center for Educational Renewal, College of Education, University of Washington, 1989); Kenneth A. Sirotnik and John I. Goodlad, eds., *School-University Partnerships in Action* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988).

²⁹Roger Soder, "How Faculty Members Feel When the Reward Structure Changes," *Phi Delta Kappan* 71 (May 1990): 702-709.

³⁰John Dewey, *The Sources of a Science of Education* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), pp. 43-44.

³¹William A. Reid, "The Institutional Context of Curriculum Deliberation," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 4 (Fall 1988): 10.

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