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Philosophical Values and Contemporary Theories of Education

Stephen M. Clinton

Part I

Introduction

Educational theorists and philosophers agree that philosophical values are at the root of a philosophy of education and that curriculum theory and educational policy choices usually follow the philosophical values (Dewey, 1943, 1946; Kneller, 1967B). Soltis (1981), for example, in the most recent NSSE yearbook on philosophy of education, argued that the issue of value choices is at the foundation of all curriculum decisions.

Likewise, Dewey (1943) argued that (1) the values of the school are a reflection of the society and that (2) the values are relative to the social situation of the country. He also thought that (3) the "higher" values of democracy would eventually come to be held on a wide-spread basis by rational people. These points anticipate, in a general way, some of the forms of current arguments of Rawls, Kohlberg, Wildavsky, Rokeach and others. Understanding the current major value proponents and having a matrix by which to assess their positions could be very significant for present discussions in philosophy of education and in philosophy of values.

Such a relation between philosophical values and the curriculum means that some system of values, held and applied more or less consistently within an educational system, affects all areas of curriculum and instruction (Burbules, 1989; Tripp, 1989). Curriculum and educational policy decisions directly effect instruction in the classroom, textbook choice, and, as Eisner found (1985), also effect teacher education programs. Thus, the educational enterprise can be seen broadly as a system implementing philosophical value choices in interaction with cultural and personal environmental elements (Garrison, 1988; Spiecker and Straughan, 1988). In order to gain a substantial view of current arguments in philosophical values it is important to examine the literature in (1) value theory, (2) educational systems, and 3) curriculum theory.

I. Background in Value Theory

In the U.S., philosophical value theorists may be grouped into four models which have developed over the past twenty years: the socio/cultural model from Wildavsky (1987); the moral development model based on Kohlberg (1981); a transcultural/social model (Rokeach, 1973); and a philosophic/historic model (Rawls, 1971, 1985; Burbles, 1990). No matrix exists for cross-comparison of the models, but one is derivable from analysis and borrowing from ideas in Thompson, et al (1990) and Turner (1990).

Such a matrix will need to evaluate fairly all the models and make use of warrants which relate to all the models.

From William Bennett (1986) to Ed Wynne (1986, 1988) to Michael Apple (1979), educational theorists seem to agree that moral values are needed, both as a philosophical foundation for the curriculum and as values to be reinforced in the curriculum; they disagree as to which ones to teach and how to teach them (Collins, 1987). Dewey (1932) and Tyler (1949) both say that a curriculum is dependent on a philosophy of education and that a philosophy of education is based on value choices concerning the nature of humankind, the purpose of humankind on earth, and the inter-relation of person to person (social interaction). The NSSE yearbook on Philosophy and Education in 1981 edited by Jonas Soltis did not disagree or indicate a change from these classic positions.

One major problem is where to ground the values which will direct the philosophy of education and the curriculum theory. In 1951, in the first post-war publication on values, the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association authored *Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools*. This document suggested that as the U.S. recovered from the war and entered a new period of growth that grounding in basic human and religious values was necessary lest the culture lose its historic base and any connection to values. Such a loss of common values would erode the foundation and lead to a further splintering of society. By the late 1960s, change of leadership in NEA had led to very different positions regarding values, which reflected the shift away from common values which was taking place in our culture. There has not been a stabilized value base for our culture since that time.

Kohlberg (1981) tried to ground values in the natural maturational development of the child. Work paralleling this has been done by Fowler (1981) attempting to ground values in spiritual development (but cf. Dykstra and Parks, 1980) and a parallel model has been developed by Purpel (1989) in education.

On other lines of inquiry many philosophers have tried to ground values on a rational metaphysical theory (Johnson, 1980). The study of such grounded values is called axiology. In a similar way theologians and religious leaders have attempted to ground values in a religious world view (Henry, 1986).

The American School Curriculum Development Board listed six values of choice in their Panel on Moral Education (1988). But these choices, however good they may be, were derived by the popular choice of the members of the panel, not by empirical or rational means.

Wildavsky (1987) and Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990) have tried to tie values choices to culture by analytic review. This sociological approach from cultural theorists has promise and can be used with care in education (Kirk, 1989). It postulates five basic cultural tendencies, which result in five sets of values. When this approach is extended radically, as in many postmodernist theories, it loses sight of the need for unity and positive values (Beyer and Liston, 1992).

Milton Rokeach, a sociologist, has taken a different approach (1973). He has shown that the same set of eighteen values can well characterize the deep values of the people in many diverse cultures. The differences between people and cultures is in how they rank order the values, thus changing the priority of the values structure. He carefully differentiates between values (deep beliefs about life), beliefs (surface beliefs about choices in life), and opinions (personal preferences). For a different, more biblical, analysis pattern for values cf. Scholes and Clinton, *Levels of Belief in the Pauline Epistles* (1991). While Rokeach has the empirical research to demonstrate that people do hold the values indicated by his survey, the survey does not form a basis for teaching values. Something more substantial and more widely acceptable is needed.

The two founding documents of the United States can be used as a historic base around which all Americans can join (Burbules, 1990). These documents were written, not to set forth a partisan political position, but to articulate truths which may be held as a permanent heritage by all people, on the basis of a certain view of people and interpersonal activities (Alexander, 1992).

The Declaration of Independence says that we Americans hold certain truths to be self-evident: 1) that all men are created equal; 2) that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; and 3) that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It states that the purpose of government is to secure these rights. The Constitution broadens the purposes of government to include:

1. to form a more perfect union;
2. to establish justice;
3. to insure domestic tranquility;
4. to provide for the common defense;
5. to promote the general welfare; and
6. to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

Clauses from these two documents specify ten values: equality, right to life, right to liberty (freedom), right to pursue happiness (autonomy of personal choice), social union, justice, domestic tranquillity, common defense, social welfare, families. With these ten values as the base and the values in the Amendments to the Constitution as supplements, a full set of values to be taught to children as the common American heritage could be developed (Lincoln, 1859; Boyer, 1988). It is important that the values in a general or national curriculum be grounded in a position which is defensible as common to all people in the United States (Gutmann, 1987; Keat, 1992). Rawls (1971) takes a similar position and calls these general principles the Principles of Justice.

None of these positions has been widely adopted as a philosophic foundation for values in education,

although the presentation of historic U.S. documents and original positions continues to be part of civic classes and U.S. history classes.

II. Background in Educational Systems

The present U.S. educational systems, both public and private, are transmitting values (Whitehead, 1985; Wynne, 1985). The formal place to discuss these values and to examine the implications of them is in the Social Studies segment of the curriculum. These values are taught as school rules from K-3rd grade, given at a deeper level as justification for the rules in 4-6th grade, and are sometimes discussed openly as values in 7-12th grade. But the full exhibition of these values needs to come in all aspects of the explicit curriculum and in the "hidden curriculum" (the attitudes and practices of the teachers and administrators), not just in social studies (Power and Kohlberg, 1986; Giroux, 1987; McNeil, 1988).

These values about humanity, freedom, equality, etc. also have implications for how to teach science and its spin-off, technology. Science has often raised the question of "if we can, should we?" and thus formulated ethical debates. The impact of science on human life and on common experiences needs to be examined. These values can give direction to selection of some of the literature in language arts classes and to the criterion of interpretation and discussion. These values even impact mathematics in the content of the story problems, especially as there is movement to use a more integrated curriculum.

These values can also give some direction to school roles in student-teacher relations, student participation in governance of the school, student-teacher-parent-district relations, parent involvement in district review committees, rules guiding student participation and behavior on school campuses, district-state-federal policies and issues, and district-teacher negotiations (the hidden curriculum effects teachers as well as students). All of this needs to reflect a commitment to local controls, personalization, involvement, partnership, innovation, educational excellence, and student centered curriculum (Sarason, 1982; Walker, 1987; Stewert, 1989).

Since Americans do in fact hold these values, it is possible to examine the consistency in living out these principles, especially in school regulations and policies. Are Americans practicing justice, equality, and respect; or do the children receive a different message in how they are treated by adults, especially by teachers and administrators?

III. Background in Curriculum Theory

There is no clear, agreed on definition of curriculum theory. Tanner and Tanner (1980) list over ten proposed definitions of curriculum theory and never select any one as a standard. The three recent books on curriculum theory (Pinar, 1975; Bower, 1987; Beyer and Apple, 1988) are from the perspective of the reconceptualists (existential to neo-Marxist). While they are very helpful on some aspects of deriving, judging, or evaluating curriculum, they are far from complete. No other books were found published in the 1980s on curriculum theory.

Much more has been done in the form of journal articles. Specifically, there are more than thirty articles from the 1980s and 1990s which are directly on the topic of curriculum theory. No more than four of these articles are from any one journal and eleven different journals are represented. There seems to be no single journal devoted to curriculum theory.

The mix of authors is equally diverse. Content ranges from democratic values to traditional moral values, from Marxist values to Christian values. Many of the authors also write in philosophy of education and in moral education. The thirty main articles are by twenty-nine different authors; no one seems to be monopolizing the field.

There are three broad issues in curriculum theory: the role of curriculum theory, the value bases of curriculum theory, and the justification of a curriculum theory.

1). The Role of Curriculum Theory

Conceptually there are four different sources of input to a curriculum theory. First is the social situation. This includes the historical and cultural issues which have formed and are forming a people or nation (Ornstein, 1989; Bloom, 1987). Second is the current political situation (Apple, 1988). Here is included the constitution of the nation or state, the Department of Education, and the policy makers in the legislature (Timar and Kirp, 1988). Third is the experience of, and experiments concerning, the learners and the learning process. This is partly captured by the psychology of learning, but includes all experimental data and teacher-student experience (Shulman, 1987). Fourth is philosophy of education. The focus here is on the values about the nature of humanity, the purpose of life, and personal relations which form the core issues of any particular philosophy (Bell and Schniedewind, 1987).

The results of these four inputs need to be directed at a particular context, whether it is public education in of California or higher education in Kenya. All four of the inputs will vary depending on which culture and which parts of the educational process one wishes to address. This contextualizing is necessary because curriculum theory is the means by which the inputs can be mixed and a coherent model for a specific educational plan may be derived (Snauwaert, 1990). Without specifying the context it is difficult to derive relevant inputs and build a specific curriculum theory (Dressel, 1984; Whitehead, 1987).

Once (1) the curriculum theory is derived, then (2) the curriculum content, (3) a teaching strategy, (4) the learning environment and activities, (5) the teaching resources, (6) the institutional plans, and (7) evaluation and feedback plans can be developed. This total package of seven elements constitutes an educational theory.

The four inputs to curriculum theory, just listed, match four of the five elements Tyler outlined in 1949. The difference between Tyler and present curriculum theorists is that he was talking about these as elements of a specific curriculum plan. The element he included which is now being left out is 'suggestions from subject specialists.' This, it is now being suggested, cannot be done until the other

four inputs have been obtained and the specific national culture and level of educational design have been specified.

Current curriculum theory, in contrast to Tyler, is seeking to do formative curriculum theorizing at a meta-curricular level. Rather than deriving one theory to apply to one educational problem, the interest is in examining the nature of any curricular theory and its possible role in human affairs (Barrow, 1990; Garrison, 1987). No positive curriculum theory has been developed on such a philosophical basis.

2). The Value Bases of Curriculum Theory

There are four areas of life which contribute foundationally to human values: political, social, economic and religious (Schubert, 1985; Waks, 1988). Some current theorists derive values from one of these areas, some derive values from two of them (Kliebard, 1985). No one uses all four. Political values include the values from the founding government documents (eg. the Declaration of Independence or the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights), the laws of the federal or state government regarding education, and the values of the political parties in power. These values can be as varied as the freedom of the political system allows. The U.S. has a pluralistic system which allows great competition for the minds of the legislators.

Social values include the social organizational values of a culture at the level of nation, state, local city, local culture, and family (Apple, 1990). The social organization can be varied and the values which are deemed important will change as the level of society or individual cultural elements are included.

Economic values tend to run across wider scopes than do social values. The U.S. functions within two economic philosophies: capitalism and government control through bureaucracy. The tensions between these two philosophies give the U.S. the unique balance of capitalization, unionization and government involvement which exists today.

Religious values continue to permeate all nations, including the U.S. (Whitehead, 1985; Vitz, 1986) In a 1990 Gallup poll it was found that 80% of U.S. citizens claim to be Christians, in one sense or another. 75% claim to believe in a personal God and 70% think Jesus Christ is God. In other countries religion also plays an important role in deriving values for education. In Malaysia the educational directions are set by the Muslim government, even though only 50% of the people in the country are Muslims. In Russia, where a political philosophy had dominated educational theory for 70 years, some education officials are leading a turn to move back to religious values to form a common human value base for curriculum theory (Tulyaeva, 1991).

These four value bases differ widely in the issues they address and the form of specification of values (Craig, 1990). But there are some common themes which are addressed by all four of the bases. These themes are: the nature of humanity, the purpose of life, and the organization of personal relationships (MacIntyre, 1990; Burbules, 1989; Purpel, 1989). Clearly, there are many diverse claimants to define the content of values in relation to these themes.

3). The Justification of a Curriculum Theory

There are three fundamental tests of a curriculum theory. They are the same as the philosophical test for any theory. First is the test of coherence (Henry, 1986). Here are included both the logical test of "does the theory contradict itself?" and the more general test "does the theory seem to make sense?" The first is a logical test and the second is a test of broad personal understanding (Giroux, 1988B).

Second is the test of correspondence. This includes the test of the relevance of the theory to corporate life and to the educational system within which educators work. The test is to see if the theory is stated such that it can be applied and will obtain the intended results within a specific group. At the theoretical level this test is rejected by some humanists and many pragmatists (Beyer, 1986), but is retained by other writers (Derr, 1981).

Third is the test of personal relevance. It asks the question, "Will this theory work in my context?" This could be subsumed under the second test except that even within a culture or social group, what will work for one teacher or school administrator would not work in a different situation or for a different person (Atkins, 1988). This is a legitimate existential (or to use Polanyi's word, "personal") test (Goodson, 1990).

The application of these three tests of a theory should revise the list of potentially applicable theories to just a few, for most educators.

4) Metaphors and Curriculum Theory

In fact, three metaphors dominate the curriculum theories (Pratte, 1981; Dickmeyer, 1989; Gage, 1989). These three metaphors are not paradigms in that they are not mutually exclusive, they are not hidden, and they do not dominate all thought for a person or for an educational system (Kuhn, 1970). While they may, under certain circumstances form a hegemony (Apple, 1979), in the U.S. at present no one of them does so.

The first metaphor is that of a conversation. Some of the theorists (eg., Giroux, 1987) have rejected the concept of any absolutes to govern life and education and like the pragmatists' metaphor of engaging in a conversation (Rorty, 1982). In this metaphor the theorist is one among many members of a community of scholars who study the area of educational curriculum and together, through dialogue, come to general agreement as to what curricular model to follow. This paradigm tends to reinforce the expert in the field as the decision maker. This coincides with a bureaucratic, top-down style of educational decision making (Morrison, 1989).

The second metaphor is that of a marketplace. Here the various theorists are seen as collaborators and competitors at different times, with the assumption that through this process some best curricular theory will eventually be found (Tanner and Tanner, 1980). This theory will always be open to development

and change to meet the ever changing needs of the educational market. Thus truth in educational choice is relative to the needs of the people and the people will be dramatically involved through their expression of changing needs and changing choices of education (Wildavsky, 1987). Theorists design and teachers teach what the market wants to buy. Of course, the theorists can go to the market with suggestions and sell the product.

The third metaphor is that of an agent. Here the focus is on the teacher and the teacher's role in actually using some particular curriculum (Wynne, 1988; Scholes, 1991). The experts are at the service of the parents and teachers to help design the best curricular model possible to meet the felt needs (Penn, 1990). Collaboration and conversation take place through people, and the system is responsive to the needs of the market through the actions of people, the focus of a system is on the teacher, the primary contact agent, whether in public or private schools or the parent in the home.

5) Conclusion regarding Curriculum Theory

Combining the metaphors with the values discussion, there are four sources of values in a society: politics, social values (Regier, 1987), economics, religion (Egan, 1988). These sources come together into some unique blend of values for each culture or nation (Peters, 1979). In a sociological description one can discern the major values which form the value set (Krathwold, 1964) of the people of the U.S. or any other national or cultural group.

IV. Conclusion to Part I.

The combination of sociological descriptions (Wildavsky, Rokeach) and analysis of founding historical documents generates the following priority list of values which do in fact characterize the United States:

1. Freedom: corporate, economic, personal, religious
2. Nuclear family as the foundation of society
3. Value of the individual, within the group; therefore, equality
of opportunity between individuals
4. Personal and social justice (Gutmann, 1990)

Each value is maximal, modified only by the preceding values in the list. These four values can be defended as particularly important to the United States, at all levels of social interaction. These values and their implications must be discussed in any analysis of American values.

In the related field of ethics these values reduce to two fundamental questions:

1. What does it mean to be a human (individual, community)?
2. Where are we going (the good life, the purpose of life)?

The sociological, historical and ethical issues raised to a philosophical level, relate to four fundamental axiological choices:

1. Are there any constraining absolutes outside human beings?
2. In epistemology, are we limited to historical processes or are there truths discernable by reason, intuition or revelation?
3. What is the best description of human nature and/or human relations?
4. What is the nature of "the good" for individuals or society?

Answers to these questions from within the macro value choices available would generate the fundamental values of an educational (or any other) system of thought.

Historically, these value sets have worked out in the U.S. in three fundamental value positions (Bernstein, 1985; Putnam, 1987), with seven or eight discernable philosophies of education. The three base positions are:

Materialism

Humanism

Theism

These are combined or split into the educational philosophies of idealism, realism, pragmatism, behaviorism, existentialism, and general social reconstruction along various lines (communism, socialism, Christian, etc.) (Kneller, 1967A).

Introduction to Part II

The above discussion clarifies the present situation somewhat and leads to the questions:

- 1) What would be an adequate matrix by which theoretical

values in a curriculum can be assessed?

2) How could such a matrix be useful in assessing the major

values proponents?

These questions also demand a critical examination. The values governing education are rarely defined clearly or universally held, especially in times of sweeping changes. They are extant in the individual leaders in education, in the "hidden curriculum," that is in the governance and administration of education, and in the form of a hegemony within the cultural context which may favor the status quo or, in times of radical change from the top, the new determiners of the educational theory. An analysis of information derived from these sources may or may not "fit" the various value schemes extant in the social, philosophical or educational literature of the U.S.

Finally, a critical analysis of the forces leading to the changes of the past six years should reveal some of the major dynamics which effect change in the American educational system. According to Thompson et. al., (1990) the U.S. is showing signs of a change in value patterns. The nature and methods of these dynamic forces can then be analyzed in light of U.S. values.

With such a matrix and a critical examination we should be able to extend knowledge of how theoretical values in a curriculum can be assessed, how a matrix for such assessment can be constructed, and should present a matrix for evaluating philosophical value theories and curriculum value theories.

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