

In Leonard J. Waks and Short, Edmund C. (Eds.) (2009). *Leaders in curriculum studies: Intellectual self-portraits* (143-142). Rotterdam and Tapei: Sense Publishers.

The Primacy of the Particular¹

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By my count, I have made seven contributions to curriculum studies. First is the concept of *currere*, the infinitive form of the noun curriculum. I invoked it first during the 1970s to denote a shift from curriculum defined as syllabus (or objectives, or from any of its conceptualizations as a static entity, implied by the noun) to curriculum conceived as the educational experience of “complicated conversation” (1995, 848; implied by the verb). *Currere* – and the autobiographical method² I devised to understand curriculum as educational experience - initiated what became, in fifteen years, an entire sector of curriculum studies scholarship (1995, chapter 10). Extolling the centrality of educational experience in understanding curriculum precipitated my participation in what turned out to be a shift in the field’s fundamental idea of itself: from a field focused on curriculum development to one devoted to understanding curriculum. My theorizing of the field’s *Reconceptualization* (2000 [1975]; 1995, Chapter 4) – contribution number 2 - informs my present studies of disciplinarity and internationalization (2003, 2007, 2008, forthcoming).

In December 1981 (in the public library of Berkeley, California where I was visiting my then five-year old son Gabriel), I theorized curriculum as gender text (in 1994, 1998), thereby establishing *queer theory* in education, *avant la lettre*. That I count as contribution number 3. Twenty years later, informed by queer theory, I reconfigured

anti-racist education from a preoccupation with attitudes (tolerance, for instance) to subjective reconstruction through academic knowledge, theorizing the gender of racial politics and violence in America by juxtaposing lynching and interracial prison rape (2001). That is contribution number 4. In that 2001 synoptic textbook, and in the genealogy of whiteness that followed (2006a), I demonstrated that curriculum development is an intellectual not bureaucratic undertaking (in press, Chapter 3; 2006b). Reconceptualizing curriculum development counts as contribution number 5.

Contributing to my queering of race was my earlier elaboration of *place* as a category in understanding curriculum, now a concept common not only in contemporary curriculum studies (see Tate 2008). Theorizing place began as an effort to contextualize the curricular challenges posed by living – as I did for twenty years - in the American South (1991). While continuing to emphasize the singularities the intersections of history and culture create, in recent years I have also acknowledged *place* as biospheric (2007a, b). This reconstruction of place as planetary animates my current effort to reconstruct humanism (in press; Said 2004). Introducing the conception of place constitutes contribution number 6.

Since 2000 (and here is number seven, although I agree the hour is early), I have initiated an intellectual and organizational movement known as the *internationalization of curriculum studies*, establishing (with help, of course) the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (www.iaacs.org), its U.S. affiliate, the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, editing the first international handbook of curriculum research (2003), and directing the Centre for the Internationalization of Curriculum Studies at the University of British Columbia

<http://csics.educ.ubc.ca/>). With funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, I have been enabled to study the intellectual histories and present circumstances of three nationally distinctive curriculum studies fields: South Africa, Brazil, and Mexico. With the time I have left before retirement I hope to study others.

The Past in the Present

I was born in Huntington, West Virginia, on August 27, 1947. In 1953 we moved to Pennsylvania (first to Emporium in the northwest corner, then to Pittsburgh); in 1955 we moved to Ohio (Westerville, a suburb of Columbus). I received a solid introduction to the various school subjects, taught by often animated and dedicated teachers. It was during my senior year (1964-1965) at Westerville High School that I glimpsed – in an honors government class taught by Mrs. Sarah Ott – what a multi-referenced complicated conversation curriculum could be. The main referents of that year-long course were the texts – among them Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers* – and the World History class Mrs. Ott had taught two years before. (Each of us had been invited as a consequence of our work with her in that earlier class.) Mrs. Ott was a superb teacher: erudite and engaging.

After graduation, I studied at a small conservatory of music in Columbus where I was a performance major: alto saxophone was my primary instrument, piano my minor. During my freshman year, Professor William Kuhre lured me to the liberal arts with his provocative teaching of freshman composition and American literature, a year-long course featuring, during spring term, J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. I transferred

first to Otterbein College, then to Ohio State, where I studied history, enjoying individual attention in an honors program under the supervision of Professor Mary Young, a distinguished historian of American Indian policy, whom I later met – this time as a colleague – at the University of Rochester. Back in Columbus, in 1966, I, too, aspired to become a historian, but when graduate school was dropped as a category of deferment from military service – an issue urgent to those of us opposed to the Vietnam War – and public school teaching remained eligible, I switched to English, a subject more in demand in the public schools, and one to which I had already been drawn.

The political chaos of those years was mirrored in my psychological life. Adrift in turbulence, I fastened upon academic study as providing opportunities to understand the reality around me while mooring me. As provocative and influential as reading William Appleman Williams was, the major intellectual event in my undergraduate life was philosophical not historical, namely existentialism and phenomenology, subjects I studied with Professor Lee Brown in Ohio State's Department of Philosophy. At first I was drawn to Kierkegaard, then Nietzsche, but I settled on Sartre. Especially his fiction (*Nausea*) forced me to confront the question: how shall I live? Like Pasternak's *Zhivago*, I embraced subjectivity as politically precious in an unjust world lacerated by violence. Nineteen sixty-eight was a violent year, indeed.

In my senior year – fall 1969 - I enjoyed an opportunity to believe again in meaningful public service, thanks to Professor Donald R. Bateman (in 1974), who permitted me to join his experimental urban education program. There I was introduced to Freire while working in the inner city of Columbus, where I tutored (in twin towers off I-70 East that remain visible today), then taught at Roosevelt Junior High School. I chose

– those were days when teachers still enjoyed some measure of academic freedom – Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* and Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* for my six-week sojourn with black inner-city eight-graders. Somehow I was offered a job that spring, probably due to the influence of Professor Bateman. Despite this opportunity and my subsequent enrolment in Ohio State’s M.A. program – that summer I took Professor Paul R. Klohr’s 860 course on curriculum development - I chose to leave Ohio to accept at a position as Teacher of English at the Paul D. Schreiber High School in Port Washington, on Long Island, New York.

While there only two years, teaching at Schreiber was an imprinting experience. Intellectually impressive, the Department of English faculty purchased paperbacks we could distribute to students according to the course we chose to teach. Teaching four classes during a nine-period day, I offered six-week-long electives of my own devising, including one on existentialist literature. Students were academically strong: most went to university, many to Ivy-League schools. I chose to teach the one small non-college-bound group. Whatever their class location, many Schreiber students were estranged: the year was, after all, 1969. Drugs were widespread, but mostly recreational: few “dropped out.” I became close to several students, among them Betsy Bernhard and Kenny Schatz, and with two other first-year teachers – Marilyn Baldauf and Gail Starkman – while admiring other colleagues from a distance. My students were skeptical but played along; indeed, a few became enthusiastic about “working from within” (in 1994). One night a week I traveled to Teachers College to attend a seminar offered by Professor Dwayne E. Huebner, to whose work Paul Klohr had introduced me. Huebner’s scholarship

influenced me deeply, and some two decades later, with his encouragement, I published his essays as *The Lure of the Transcendent*.

The other curriculum theorist who influenced me most as a graduate student – Klohr and Bateman were supervising directed readings during my time on Long Island teaching - was James B. Macdonald (1995). Later, Kliebard's critiques of Tyler and analyses of the field's failings – specifically its atheoretical and ahistorical character – proved decisive in my efforts to find my way in a field falling apart (in 2000 [1975]). As a resident Ph.D. student in 1971, I supervised English student teachers while taking courses in education, English and Psychology. In the English Department I studied 20th-century British and Irish literature with Professors Morris Beja and John Muste. In the Psychology Department, I studied psychopathology and participated in a Tavistock group, not so very different from the National Training Lab encounter group work I had undergone earlier. I was determined to link the experiential with the intellectual, and these academic studies juxtaposed with psychological experiments (such as Tavistock and NTL) helped me to focus on what was at stake. In my Ph.D. dissertation research I theorized a humanities curriculum that cultivated self-formation through the juxtaposition of academic study, solitude, and encounter group experience.

Klohr met with me regularly to discuss what we were reading. (We met over lunch, a tradition I continued with my own Ph.D. students.) He questioned, challenged, and encouraged me, acting as a supportive skeptic. He became my intellectual father, and I never tired of listening to him. For thirty-five years after I graduated I returned to him at his home at 420 Walhalla in Columbus. Traveling from first Rochester, then from Baton

Rouge, and finally from Vancouver, I would not miss an opportunity to spend several days with my beloved Paul.

Many of Paul's students adored him, and each of us – I know several still today – learned something unique from our relationship with him. I took from him his keen interest in theoretical developments, including those outside the field of education. Still I remember his palpable excitement upon discovering Michael Polyani's *Personal Knowledge* and, later, Richard J. Bernstein's *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*. From him I came to experience curriculum studies as a dramatic and ongoing intellectual event. While the public school provided the primary site for engagement with curriculum studies, education has never been for me an institutional problem to be solved, but, rather, a provocative phenomenon to be understood. Other Klohr students concluded otherwise. That was, in part, the man's pedagogical genius, his capacity – through focused conversation drawing upon his erudition, exercising his pedagogical discernment – to draw out the originality of each student. How I have worked – much more clumsily - to do the same with mine!

After the Ph.D. was conferred in 1972, I took a job at the University of Rochester. There I met Madeleine Grumet, Janet L. Miller, and Peter Taubman.³ Each influenced me deeply, including in feminist theory and gender studies.⁴ Madeleine joined me in the study of autobiography in teacher education (2006 [1976]), extending its theoretical elaboration through phenomenology and psychoanalysis, traditions she mastered and melded in her *Bitter Milk* (1988). From the University's point of view, Madeleine was my doctoral student, but the truth was that I was hers.

Janet Miller and I collaborated on the establishment of what would become the Bergamo Conference (the conference of the Reconceptualization of curriculum studies) and on *JCT* (the journal of the Reconceptualization). I dedicated to Janet the collection subtitled *Twenty Years of JCT* (1999), but these acknowledgements hardly capture the complexity of her contribution to curriculum studies (Miller 2005). Both Bergamo and *JCT* continue today: <http://www.jctbergamo.com/>

Peter Taubman introduced me to the work of Foucault, as he embraced his first translated works, specifically *The Archeology of Knowledge*, which Peter employed in his critique of gender essentialism. Recently, with Foucauldian detail and theoretical sophistication he has detailed the calamity that is U.S. school deform (2009). During the 1990s Peter introduced me to the cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini and the 1906 novel *Young Torless* by Robert Musil. Each has remained central to my intellectual life (2002); I composed a biographical sketch of Pasolini to personify the worldliness of a cosmopolitan education (in press). I glossed Musil's novel (2006) and am now portraying Musil as a public pedagogue.

At Rochester I enjoyed proximity to great scholars, among them historians Christopher Lasch, Eugene Genovese, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, the great Dickens scholar George H. Ford, and philosopher Lewis White Beck. Beck – with whom I chatted over Saturday lunches at the Faculty Club - kindly advised me in my readings in autobiography. But the most formative intellectual influence during those years – the early 1970s - was Virginia Woolf, whose novels I had studied as a graduate student at Ohio State. Now it was not only her fiction but her life that preoccupied me; I reread Quentin Bell's biography several times. Her stream-of-consciousness method inspired me

to dwell upon sensory detail in the method of *currere*, her feminist courage inspired what would become, later, my own gendered struggles, and her central position in the Bloomsbury Group inspired my inchoate conception of what an academic community might mean.

While Woolf was the most formative, she was not the only influence. I was reading psychoanalytic theory (especially object relations theory: Chodorow 1978) and phenomenology as I tried to imagine a future for the field after Tyler. My early pieces (in 1975, reprinted in 2000) testify to my efforts to theorize curriculum as structured by the intersections among autobiography, history, and culture.

During my first years at Rochester my relationship with Paul Klohr intensified. I wrote him every day. He helped me plan the 1973 Rochester Conference – inaugurating the Reconceptualization – and participated in the event (in 1974.) The summer after we spent a week together on upstate New York’s Keuka Lake, rowing and reading and talking, my own micro-moment of Bloomsbury. While it was Don Bateman who had introduced me to the intellectually serious study of education it was Paul Klohr whom I loved. His stories fascinated me: his childhood, his undergraduate days studying German in Indiana, working afterward as a high-school teacher in Illinois interrupted by World War II, his graduate school days studying with Harold Albery at Ohio State, his initial faculty appointment at Syracuse University, his stint as curriculum coordinator of the Columbus Public Schools, as Head of Ohio State’s Laboratory School (and his excruciating experience of its demise at the hands of right-wing demagogues), his subsequent service in the Dean’s office at Ohio State’s College of Education, and the final phase of his career as a professor. Equally important (and inseparable from these

discussions) was our ongoing reflection on the nature and function of curriculum studies, including its history, its relationship with schools, its possible futures. To think about these topics required, Paul always asserted, knowledge not only of the field itself, but of related disciplines, especially social theory and philosophy, which Paul read constantly. Aside from my parents, Paul is the major influence in my life.

It was during my early years at Rochester that I fastened onto autobiography as a means to recast curriculum study. Neo-Marxists would misunderstand the autobiographical emphasis as bourgeois narcissism rather than a relocation of the political project in which many of us had engaged during the 1960s. Others would detach autobiographical study from the curriculum, morphing it into “narrative inquiry.” From the phenomenological I moved – as did many others – to poststructuralist understandings of subjectivity and society, influenced by Foucault (at first through Taubman), then later by Derrida and Deleuze (at first through the brilliant Jacques Daignault and Clermont Gauthier, who began attending Bergamo in the early 1980s, later inspired by my LSU colleague Denise Egéa-Kuehne and the great Ted Aoki, who also made a similar journey from phenomenology to poststructuralism: in 2005). Only in recent years have I recoiled from what now seems to me an excessive textualism in post-structuralism, undertaking a reconstruction of humanism (in press). But I get ahead of myself.

Certain that the consolidation of the intellectual gains made during the Reconceptualization required institutionalization, I took on the chairmanship of Curriculum and Instruction at Louisiana State University in 1985, hiring a number of new Ph.D.s to institutionalize the Reconceptualization.⁵ Those were heady days – LSU was a hospitable and intellectually stimulating place, Bergamo was reaching its apex (at one

late 1980s conference 453 presentations were listed) – and I began to chronicle the Reconceptualization. That project threatened to overwhelm me, and so I invited three former doctoral students – William Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, and Peter Taubman – to join me in what became *Understanding Curriculum* (1995). (My effort to write a sequel did overwhelm me and I withdrew. Former *JCT* Editor and Co-Director - with Mary Aswell Doll - of the Bergamo Conference Marla Morris has undertaken the project. If anyone can succeed at this daunting project, Marla can.) I had hoped to publish a series of readers to accompany *Understanding Curriculum* (illustrating each of the discourses), but I managed to find time to produce only six (1992 [with Reynolds], 1993 [with Castenell], 1998b, 1998c, 1999, 2005 [with Irwin]) of the planned eleven.

After *Understanding Curriculum* I devoted myself to race studies. Becoming committed to an African American man – on September 26, 2008 Jeff Turner and I celebrated our 13th anniversary – and living in Louisiana provided existential stimulus for renewing my study of race I had first undertaken as an undergraduate. Never losing the self-reflexive impulse autobiographical study habitualized, I then turned my attention to whiteness, resulting in the most intellectually experimental of my works (2006a). There I juxtaposed Noah – the mythological inception of racial servitude in Genesis 9:23 – with Daniel Paul Schreber, the infamous late-nineteenth German judge whose memoirs Freud used to devise his theory of paranoia as disavowed homosexual desire in theorizing whiteness as the “curse of the covenant.”

I have always studied subjectivity as a passage to (rather than a retreat from) the world; during these first years of the new millennium my engagement with curriculum studies scholars worldwide multiplied. What became the project of internationalization

started by accident; in 1993 I had represented the United States at a UNESCO conference on curriculum worldwide held in Santiago, Chile. In Oslo, Norway, in 1995, I represented U.S. curriculum studies in what (I learned later) was supposed to be a “face-off” with Wolfgang Klafki, the great German theorist of Didaktik. (The confrontation never occurred.) Back in Baton Rouge, Bill Doll, Donna Trueit, and I organized two international conferences, one in 1999 on philosophy of education (taking advantage of a world meeting in nearby New Orleans) and in 2000 a Conference on the Internationalization of Curriculum Studies, drawing scholars from every continent and thirty-plus countries. On the final morning I offered to meet with those interested in founding an international association. Not expecting much interest, I had reserved a room holding 15, but 150 showed up! Working during the year with representatives from each continent, I helped inaugurate the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (www.iaacs.org). IAACS’ first triennial meeting was held in 2003 in Shanghai, China; the second in 2006 in Tampere, Finland; and the 2009 meeting is scheduled for South Africa.

During that same academic year I worked with U.S. colleagues to form the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, an IAACS affiliate. After its inception in 2001, I persuaded the general membership to authorize three interrelated undertakings: 1) the formation of a journal – edited by Alan A. Block – focused on the intellectual production of the field, 2) a Commission on the State of Curriculum Studies in the United States – directed by Madeleine R. Grumet – that would survey the institutional circumstances of the field and provide recommendations for

administrators, and 3) a Canon Project to institutionalize attentiveness to the intellectual history of U.S. curriculum studies.

It was what Janet Miller (2005, 249) has termed the “worldliness” of curriculum studies that persuaded me to leave LSU after twenty years to take up the directorship of the Centre for the Study of the Internationalization of Curriculum Studies at the University of British Columbia (<http://csics.educ.ubc.ca/>). In Canada I can pursue – with federal funding and free of homeland security preoccupations – complicated conversation among nationally distinctive curriculum studies fields. The first of several reports (forthcoming) nears production.

Now sitting in my sixties, I am clear that my intellectual life was structured first by my parents, Frederick Eugene Pinar (1920-1988), an aeronautical engineer, and Malinda Brooke (1917-1982), a night-club singer and regional radio personality. From Dad I internalized the injunction that “understanding” was the most important thing in life; from Mom I learned that pleasure was paramount. With these twin and often opposing dispositions embedded in me, I have been driven to understand the reality around and within me. I have sought pleasure well outside the confines of the bourgeois life for which I was conditioned by school and society. Despite its appearance as a quiet scholarly life (finally, now it is), my life has been intense, dramatic, and very full. Imprinted by my parents and our post-World War II experience – haunted by economic and political catastrophes, driven by the intensity of seeking pleasure because death was imminent, overwhelmed with love of country in a brief period of post-war triumph and relief quickly turning to alarm and the enduring emergency that was the Cold War – and by their distinctive injunctives (my parents’ own singular adaptations of these historical

realities mixed with their psychic and genetic inheritances), and, later, with the help of friends and the intimacy of lovers (in my life, intermixed categories), I have found passages through the labyrinth that has been my life, compelled to understand, and thereby participate, in the reconstruction of the reality confronting us.

Notes

1. Quoted from Flores (2006, 64), this phrase summarizes my ongoing inquiry; it specifies the subjective link among my seven contributions to curriculum studies. It also acknowledges my appreciation for those individuals named here who have been so significant to me over the years. Prominent among these is Paul R. Klohr, who died this past summer. I compose this self-portrait in his shadow.

2. To understand educational experience autobiographically, I suggested (juxtaposing Freud and Sartre), one might work regressively (re-experiencing the past), progressively (imagining the future), analytically (understanding what one had discovered regressively and progressively), synthetically (acting in the world): 1994, 1995, 2004.

3. I enjoyed the company of other astonishing doctoral students during my time at Rochester (1972-1985), among them Stephen DeMocker, Bonnie Meath-Lang, Ronald Padgham, JoAnne Pagano, Meredith Reininger, William Reynolds, and Sandra Wallenstein. My colleagues are memorable, too: philosopher Robert Osborn provided friendship and constant questioning, Eleanore Larson was wise and quietly encouraging, Bill Lowe was skeptical but supportive. Dean James Doi funded the 1973 Conference that inaugurated the Reconceptualization. I hired Philip Wexler in 1981; during our time together jogging and parenting Philip taught me social theory.

4. Upon leaving Rochester, I found close colleagues at Louisiana State University. Ron Good (2005) – jointly appointed to the Department of Physics – was a close friend and constant critic of my interest in psychoanalysis. Professor Petra Munro Hendry animated my interest in Jane Addams as she elaborated a theory of feminist curriculum history (in 1998b, 1999). In addition to being colleagues and friends in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Petra and I worked together in Women's and Gender Studies. There I met remarkable colleagues outside education, among them English Professor Elsie Mitchie, who brought Kaja Silverman to my attention. My time at LSU was the best time of my life, and central to that period were my friendships with Bill Doll, Mary Aswell Doll, Marla Morris, and Donna Trueit. I have before acknowledged Bill's importance to me (2006b, xiv-xv); we've been friends since 1976, having known each other in upstate New York, south Louisiana, and now the Pacific Northwest.

5. There are many remarkable Ph.D. students who graduated from LSU during my time there (1985-2005), among them Brian Casemore, Toby Daspit, Susan Edgerton, Brenda Hatfield, Nicole Guillory, Wen-Song Wu, Laura Jewett, Doug McKnight, Marla Morris, Anthony Molina, Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, Anne Pautz, Patrick Slattery, Hongyu Wang, Ugena Whitlock.

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Personal Favorites

Autobiography, Politics and Sexuality (1994)

Race, Religion and a Curriculum of Reparation (2006)

The Synoptic Text Today and other essays (2006)

The Worldliness of a Cosmopolitan Education (2009)

Personal Favorites in curriculum studies

Talmud, Curriculum and the Practical by Alan A. Block

A Post-Modern View of Curriculum by William E. Doll, Jr.

Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching by Madeleine R. Grumet

The Lure of the Transcendent by Dwayne E. Huebner

Theory as a Prayerful Act by James B. Macdonald

The Sound of Silence Breaking and Other Essays by Janet L. Miller

Teaching by Numbers by Peter M. Taubman

