Review Article

Curriculum Visions

William E. Doll and Noel Gough (Eds.). New York: Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 328. ISBN 0-82044-999-7.

“Curriculum” is an interesting word that conjures up discussion no matter where you say it. In a Masters of Education curriculum theory class I recently attended, this one simple word started a loud and raucous discussion. Yet the discussion did not involve how our current curriculum came about nor if it was failing students and teachers alike, instead it revolved around time constraints and the further narrowing of ideas and concepts surrounding curriculum if teachers were ever going to cover it all. There were no new ideas, no thoughts from outside “the box”; the students in the class simply accepted the current situation and bickered about the minute details involved. I came away from that class disheartened by what had occurred, a feeling that I share with many of the authors and both editors of *Curriculum Visions*.

This text takes the form of a conversation between the editors, the authors, and the individuals who respond to each essay providing necessary perspective. This lively and interactive dialogue, where authors often refer to other essays within the collection, draws the reader in and places them in the discussion of “the limitations, distortions, defects, and dangers” of current curriculum theory and practice and to envision some methods which may improve them (p. 16). The editors, William Doll Jr. and Noel Gough, provide a foundation from which the many essays are able to launch their visions. Gough calls upon the need for embodying curriculum visions and asks the readers to take the next step in envisioning our curriculum futures. Doll asks us to “reconceptualize the nature of curriculum” and break out from under the ghost of control, moving instead towards the visions of John Dewey; a more complex and interactive form of control emerging from the “interactions happening within an event or set of experiences.” These two views set the stage for wonderfully rich and complex visions the contributors have for curriculum throughout the remainder of the text.

Rather than attempt to convey the fascinating and diverse re-visionings that all the contributors put forth, I will focus on three chapters that deal specifically with complexity. Doll’s introduction serves as the first vision of curriculum within the text that breaks away from the mechanistic, outcome based ideas previously presented by curricularists such as Bobbitt and Tyler. The first section of his introduction traces this lineage and history of curriculum through its origins of being understood as a method of control before discussing John Dewey’s vision that “integrates education, schooling, curriculum, and community into a seamless whole” (p. 36). In this sense control is not imposed, but instead is emergent. Doll answers Dewey’s ghost and reframes his vision in terms of “*currere*, complexity, cosmology, conversation, and community,” all of which focus on relationships as “the ultimate reality” (*italics in original*, p. 42). Curriculum is a complex web of interactions out of which more new and more complex levels arise rather than a linear course to be run. Community is the

“cement” holding together the other elements of Doll’s vision. It allows currere to interact with life; an interaction that is key to the process of curriculum. Curriculum cannot occur in a vacuum, as any teacher understands, and so community enables a student’s experience to be reconstructed. It is the emergence of understanding and knowledge through the complex interactions and reconstruction of experience that occurs within a caring community that Dewey and Doll envision. This vision of curriculum as complexity is much more reflective of what actually occurs in classrooms and in daily life.

In chapter 5, Jayne Fleener relates Dewey’s ecological logic to process theories of change such as the complexity sciences. She believes that Dewey’s logic will provide the foundation for an organocentric curriculum and provide insight into how changes can be made to current perspectives on curriculum. Dewey grounds his approach to inquiry in the situation, “emphasizing the dynamic and inextricable relationship between an organism and its environment” (p. 153). This systems view fits very nicely with complexity theory and the concept of the organism and environment co-adapting. By using complex adaptive systems theory we can enable a organocentric curriculum which is able to adapt to the rapidly changing society of today. This curriculum focuses on the complex relationships involved in the school/society and student/inquiry interaction; very different from the current structuralist curriculum which focuses on more traditional pieces of curriculum such as the content and subjects (p. 159). The curriculum then becomes inextricably tied to experiences and habits, where habits of inquiry developed through experience enable further inquiry. Fleener’s vision is firmly grounded in complexity science, and sees curriculum becoming a complex, adaptive, emergent web of interactions that is focused on relationships rather than individual pieces of content. She follows Gough and Doll’s call to heed the ghost of Dewey, and envision a curriculum that breaks from the deterministic and mechanistic view that permeates our society as of now by re-visioning curriculum as organocentric entity which is adaptive, creative, and viable.

In the essay entitled “Curriculum: A Journey Through Complexity, Community, Conversation, Culmination,” Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore takes the vision of Doll deeper. Rather than explore each of these elements in isolation, she asks us to look at them in relation to their counterparts of simplicity, individuality, silence, and new beginnings. She sees simplicity and complexity not as adversaries, but as companions where simplicity lures us to “seek meanings within complexity” (p. 221). As such, education needs to invite people to look for “insights and visions” in complexity, but also to accept and enjoy the “unsolved mysteries that confront them” (Ibid.). Seeking these insights and visions furthers Doll and Dewey’s perception of reality as it allows a more engaging and intense interaction enabling them to move further into complexity. Moore explains that by looking for simplicity in an interactive curriculum, students are able to focus on interactions rather than on pieces of information. Yet, at the same time complexity cannot be contained within well defined systems. They are natural, organic, and messy. They defy the comprehensive “everything” theories, and incite further exploration. As a result, in Moore’s words “educators are challenged to invite people into insights, visions, and

unsolved mysteries through the complexity that they and others experience in the journey of life” (p. 222). Even as we move to a more complex view of curriculum we cannot simply ignore simplicity, but use it to engage students in complexity.

As I tried to write this review, I was continually presented with the challenge of somehow connecting such a wide and varied collection of essays and visions. How does the poetic text presented from the native perspective by Peter Cole and Patricia O’Riley relate to the spiritual discussion put forth by Hongyu Wang. Yet, as I continued to look over and contemplate the various visions, there seemed to be a connection. The collection as an entirety represents the complex vision of curriculum which Doll speaks about in his introduction. Each element, whether spiritual, scientific, or narrative in nature, interacts and resonates with all the other elements to create an emergent complexity which encompasses the future vision of curriculum. One cannot simply think of curriculum as any one of these elements, but rather the connections and interactions which make curriculum such a fluid concept. However, even as you read through this text and see the overall complexity, we must heed Moore’s advice and the simplicity of insights and visions provided by individual authors such as Doll, Fleener, and Moore. By engaging this text in an intense and interactive manner, we are able to find insights within its complexity.

The illuminating conversation provided by the editors and contributors to *Curriculum Visions* challenges the reader to re-examine his or her curriculum experience and re-envision curriculum in the future. These individuals ask that we go forth and carve out spaces for meaningful learning rather than simply follow the status quo. As such, this text is invaluable for all those involved in curriculum studies and will inspire minds to see their own visions of curriculum. Hopefully this text will enable each of us to have the intellectual and challenging discussion which was missing in my curriculum theory course and, as a result, will enable us “to take back the reins of education” (p. 246).

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