The Re-historicisation and Increased Contextualisation of Curriculum and Its Associated Pedagogies

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Abstract

Curriculum has traditionally been an ahistorical and technical field. The consequence has been to view curriculum and its associated pedagogical practices as neutral entities, devoid of meaning – in essence arising *ex nihilo*. However, this naïve assumption has fatefully resulted in revisiting the same swamps over and over again. Standardised curriculum and pedagogy function invisibly to reproduce class and inequality and to institutionalise cultural norms. Despite lingering attempts to maintain this technocratic approach that ignores subcutaneous meanings, a strong movement has emerged to reconceptualise curriculum in terms of its historical and sociopolitical context. While it is conceded that this is a step into a larger quagmire, it is a necessary one if true progress is to be made. Nevertheless, this large quagmire provides the possibility of escape, unlike the fatal determinism of forever returning to the swamps. Expectedly, this move to reconceptualise curriculum has its critics. Their arguments are also addressed, in particular the perceived tendency to separate theory and practice. Although curriculum and curriculum practices can be contextualised in many ways, this paper focuses primarily on key political concepts and concealed constructs such as hegemony, reproduction and resistance, resilience of the institution, the non-neutral nature of knowledge, the inclusion/exclusion principle, slogan systems and the hidden curriculum. Only by understanding the complex historical and political nature of curriculum can teaching professionals understand the hidden meaning of their practices. This is the first step for professionals to take in order to achieve Giroux's (1979, 1985, 1992) vision of teachers as transformative professionals (particularly through collaborative frameworks like the IDEAS project) in a climate of standardised curriculum and testing.

Introduction: Repeated Problems of Curriculum and Pedagogy

A common reply in Australia when one is asked how one is going is "Same old, same old". The implied meaning of this expression is that things are going along the same as before with no significant changes and no news of particular interest. Unfortunately, in many cases this expression can also be applied to the question of how schooling is going. In particular, there are the repeated problems that schools face with issues of curriculum and pedagogy meeting the needs of their student population. Research by the team at the Leadership Research Initiative at the University of Southern Queensland on school revitalisation found a number of recurring problems in a variety of schools that they studied.

Firstly, lack of cohesion was a problem reported in many case studies (Andrews & Crowther, 2003, 2006; Lewis, 2006). This involved a lack of agreement about what should be taught and perhaps more importantly about how it should be taught (Andrews & Crowther, 2006). In fact, over 90% of the schools studied did not have school wide pedagogy as an important focus (Andrews & Crowther, 2003). Secondly, there was the problem of poor perceptions from the community which was closely linked with a sense of isolation of the school from its local community (Andrews & Crowther, 2006; Lewis, 2006). Thirdly, there was the unsuitability of the curriculum and pedagogy for the school itself. This was particularly the case for disadvantaged schools such as the one studied by Lewis (2006), which reported high levels of disengagement, poor behaviour and low student performance. Similar characteristics were reported by Andrews and Crowther (2006) in one particular case study. Finally, and closely related to disadvantage and disengagement, there is the problem of low staff morale, teacher isolation and associated low expectations of students (Lewis, 2006).

Some of the common problems faced by schools having been outlined, this paper seeks to provide a detailed theoretical perspective on the broader context of curriculum and pedagogy in order to shed light on why such problems continue to recur. Following this, illustrations from a school revitalisation process called IDEAS are examined as these theoretical concepts and meanings emerge from practice.

Curriculum Background: Political Discourse

Curriculum and its associated pedagogy are the essence of schooling (Klein, 1986); metaphorically it is the rudder for its ship. Curriculum comes from the Latin word "*currere*", which literally means "to be running"; thus, it encompasses the idea of a running track (Lovat & Smith, 1995; Thorpe, 2005). Despite our ideals of a nice, clearly marked athletic track, curriculum has no clear start or finish and no one marked path to be run. Instead, it is more like a complex cross country track with many twists and turns and alternative pathways. Pinar and Grumet (1982) remark that there are no universally accepted frameworks for curriculum and no set boundaries for its demarcation. This messy nature of curriculum is best expressed by Hazlett (1979):

> Curriculum is unsure of its boundaries; it suffers from chronic definitional ambiguity (there is not even a standard nomenclature for its members); it persistently stumbles over the notion of theory; its treatment of contradictions tends toward expediency; its agenda is cyclical rather than linear; and though always moving, it shows few signs of development. (p. 132)

On a prophetic note, Popkewitz (1992) argues that we have entered into a quagmire and unfortunately there are no simple, clear cut directions for escape. Nevertheless, if we are to become transformative professionals in both curriculum and pedagogy, we must first step into the quagmire of context. This paper examines the necessary move into that quagmire by examining the re-historicisation and the increased contextualisation of curriculum. Such a transition is not without its critics and their concerns are noted and addressed in the paper.

The re-historicisation of curriculum

In the early 1970s the curriculum field was largely ahistorical and apolitical (Hazlett, 1979; Pinar, 1992). In his examination into the state of the curriculum field in 1969, Goodlad (1969) showed that methodological concerns were pre-eminent in curriculum

studies. It was also at this time that critics of this ahistorical approach began to voice their concerns. A case in point is Bellack's (1969) frustration that each generation had to rediscover similar problems because of the naïve belief that issues arose *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Traditionally, curriculum has been built solely on technical approaches such as that of Tyler (Klein, 1986). In the late 1970s there was an increasing interest in curriculum history despite its critics arguing its regressive focus (Davis, 1977). Since that time there has been a steady resurgence of interest in curriculum history (Pinar, 1999).

Historical study of curriculum is valuable in that it broadens its horizons and draws out complexities in terms of relations and structures (Alberty & May, 1987; Marsh, 1992). Following this further, history provides context; it enables us to understand the antecedents of our current position (Davis, 1977) – a concept provided by Foucault, known as the "history of the present" (Green & Beavis, 1996). Understanding the antecedents of our present state is the first step in helping to identify barriers to change that prevent a genuine transformation of curriculum. Yet there are cautions to be heeded when participating in the field of curriculum history. Green and Beavis (1996) warn of movements such as progressivism and romanticism, in that they often lack rigour and can be overly simplistic. Likewise, history coupled with ideology can be used to oversimplify as well as promote propaganda about current and future directions (Davis, 1977; Hazlett, 1979). At the other end of the spectrum is the risk of falling into a very mechanistic, narrow reporting of history that fails to allow for alternative perspectives (Hazlett, 1979). Green and Beavis (1996, p. 9) fittingly call this "safe archivalism".

The history of curriculum is not a chronology of events; rather it examines a myriad of events in time and space (Giroux & Simon, 1984) and a multitude of differential pathways (Popkewitz, 1997, 2000). This contrast is best summed up by Thorpe (2005, p. 66; *emphasis added*): "Historical time is thus a *set of relations* and a *plurality*, not a mechanical and linear register upon which events can be mapped as history".

One of the most influential approaches to curriculum history is Foucault's aforementioned "history of the present" (Green & Beavis, 1996). Central to this approach is the examination of the effects of power in historical practices through techniques such as genealogy (Green & Beavis, 1996; Popkewitz, 1998). Genealogy searches for discontinuities, ruptures and breaks (Franklin, 1999; Popkewitz, 1997), seeking out and embracing ironies, contradictions and paradoxes (Popkewitz, 1998). For this reason, it does not follow a unilateral direction from present to past; rather it moves backwards and forwards between past and present over what Popkewitz (1998) terms "shifting terrain". Foucault is gratefully acknowledged by Habermas for his contribution to understanding social and historical phenomena (Popkewitz, 1998). It is now that we turn to the important link between the social and the historical.

Curriculum in context

Since schooling exists within a wide framework of social arrangements that are themselves historically grounded (Popkewitz, 1979), it comes as no surprise that accompanying the re-historicisation of curriculum is the increased contextualisation of curriculum. Curriculum is much broader than its technical aspects; it is embedded in context that is both complex and turbulent (Alberty & May, 1987; Reid, 1978). Social regulation in general goes back long before western society (Davis, 1977). Today

society as a whole is governed through the conduct of the individual and the use of schooling to create social norms (Popkewitz, 2004). The processes of governance are complex and multifaceted; therefore any efforts to outline these to put curriculum in context will be, by their inherent nature, limited and incomplete.

Context can be divided up in an endless array of ways. Lovat and Smith (1995) acknowledge the historical, political, social and economic contexts; Apple (2002) examines Bernstein's three spheres of social life: economic, political and cultural. Apple's efforts at contextualising curriculum have been criticised for being short sighted in failing to take into account dimensions such as gender, race and class (Adair, 2005). One of the most important efforts to date in contextualising curriculum is Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman's (1995) text *Understanding Curriculum*. This important work focuses on diverse contexts of curriculum text from political and racial to autobiographical, theological and phenomenological, to name a few. It is not the intention of this paper to summarise or synthesise this work; rather the focus is largely on one particular aspect: the political. An important decision such as this one is not made lightly or on an *ad hoc* basis; rather it is made on a carefully justifiable basis. Firstly, despite the vast array of contextual dimensions, of which many are contested, Pinar and Bowers (1992) argue that without doubt curriculum must be viewed at least in part as political text. Secondly, Giroux (1994), one of the pioneers of the political nature of curriculum, asserts that curriculum is by nature balanced in favour of those with power and thus the political is fundamental to understanding curriculum. Thirdly, the political nature of curriculum arose together with the re-historicisation of curriculum in the early 1970s (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995). Finally, other dimensions of curriculum cannot be divorced from the political (Pinar & Bowers, 1992). One cannot say that gender, race or class are apolitical; even theology in a secular government is not entirely apolitical. Examples include the debate on the Federal Government's allocation of funding to public and private schools or the decision of the Howard Government to fund chaplains in Australian schools and finally the Federal Government's criticism of the lack of values taught in public schools. In the same way, Apple (2002) cites Bernstein in observing that dimensions such as gender and ethnicity, while unique in many aspects, still followed class regulated modes of reproduction. To understand the extent of these modes of reproduction, it is vital to address key concepts as they relate to the political nature of curriculum.

Hegemony

Apple (1979) developed the concept of hegemony in education based on the work of political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Hegemony is where the dominant or ruling class seeks to exercise political control through a number of meanings and practices, including the use of ideology (Apple, 1979; Marsh, 1992; Pinar & Bowers, 1992). Education is not insulated from wider society and to understand the nature of hegemony it is necessary to examine these relations (Apple, 1992). Specifically, education is like a relay station that relays signals (meanings, symbols, ideologies) from those with power, through the institution of school, to society as a whole (Apple, 2002; Popkewitz, 2004). As a result, power is not wielded overtly; rather it is exercised covertly through the organisation of daily practices (Popkewitz, 2000). The purpose of hegemony is the reproduction of culture and class (Apple, 1979; Pinar & Bowers, 1992).

Reproduction and resistance

Reproduction is a concept originally based on Marxist philosophy, where society as a whole is designed to reproduce inequalities. Apple (1979, 1992) writes from a neo-Marxist perspective where he espouses a unidirectional Marxist model that flows from the base to the superstructure. Both Apple and Giroux assert that schools are among the central institutions for reproducing class structure and the sociocultural *status quo* of society (Apple, 1979; Pinar & Bowers, 1992). This is achieved through a number of mechanisms such as ideology and the use of symbolisms that are designed to reproduce social norms (Apple, 1979). Through schools, ideologies can easily be manipulated to serve the interests of the dominant class (Lovat & Smith, 1995) and silence the voices of dissenters (Marsh, 1984). Poor communities in particular seem to illustrate this principle where schools fail to respond to the needs of students and yet maintain the status of professionals (Popkewitz, 1975). A classic case is Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour* (as cited in Marsh, 1992; Pinar & Bowers, 1992), where 12 working class 'lads' resisted the authority of the school culture. Rather than achieving significant change, all that they achieved was to reproduce their male working class positions.

Nevertheless, reproduction theory is not without its critics. Pinar and Bowers (1992) outline the rejection of the Marxist base–superstructure model by many curriculum scholars owing to its overly simplistic, linear, cause and effect flow. Furthermore, reproduction lacks personal agency and results in what Giroux terms a discourse of despair, in that nothing could ever change in an endless cycle of socially unjust reproductions (Giroux & Simon, 1984; Pinar & Bowers, 1992; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995). Subsequently, there was a transition from reproduction to resistance theory. Resistance theory examined issues of class, race and gender through the mechanisms of pedagogy and practice (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995). In addition, resistance allowed for greater complexity by examining the contradictory nature of practice (Pinar & Bowers, 1992), and saw teachers as transformative intellectuals with the power to create change (Giroux, 1994; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995). Despite enthusiasm for resistance theory, it was quickly realised that teachers are part of an institution, the institution of schooling that is very resilient to change (Popkewitz, 1979).

Resilience of the institution

An important lesson learned from Foucault is that social complexity and discourses of power are intertwined with institutions (Popkewitz, 1988). Bureaucracy tends to be closely associated with institutions and in the case of schools it allows them a degree of insulation, not from the political but rather from the community through the use of clever jargon, specialised knowledge and hierarchical structure (Popkewitz, 1979). In fact, institutions such as schools have well-developed social structures and symbol systems through which curriculum is regulated (Franklin, 1999; Popkewitz, 1979). To demonstrate such structures, one needs only to examine the labels used by schools in categorising individuals such as "slow learner" and "behaviour disorder" (Franklin, 1999). These structures and symbols are used to pass on selected elements of culture – that is, key knowledge and social norms – through carefully selected inclusion and exclusion (Popkewitz, 1979).

Non-neutral nature of knowledge

Foucault observed that power is personified in the way that people both gain and use knowledge (Apple, 1999; Popkewitz, 1994). Consequently, knowledge is not a neutral commodity but contains hidden norms and values (Giroux, 1979; Popkewitz, 2000). It is the underlying nature of these norms that is a cause for concern, as there is a common assumption that knowledge is neutral (Apple, 1979). Besides the non-neutral nature of knowledge itself, there is also the issue of how knowledge is distributed (Apple, 1979). Popkewitz (1979) states that the institutional nature of schools results in only certain types of knowledge being distributed in order to maintain cultural norms and social ascendancy. Distribution is justified on the basis of the social authority of the professional, which in congruence with the scientific paradigm assumes specialised expertise of the small trained elite (Popkewitz, 1979).

The question then becomes, "How does one gain ascendancy through knowledge?". To help answer this question, Apple developed the concept of high status knowledge, which is indispensable for society's survival and development (Apple, 1992; Lovat & Smith, 1995). High status knowledge has important value in a knowledge economy and consequently disciplines such as maths and science are valued within industrialised nations (Apple, 1992). Therefore those who have high status knowledge gain power and those without become, to a certain degree, powerless (Lovat & Smith, 1995). With curriculum as the regulator of this knowledge, the political nature of curriculum becomes more apparent. Metaphorically, Popkewitz (2000) sees curriculum as an alchemy of knowledge. In the same way that ancient alchemists attempted to turn lead into gold, curriculum seeks to reduce intellectual accumulations of say a biologist into limited teaching practices (Popkewitz, 2000). Nevertheless, an important distinction must be made in Popkewitz's metaphor. While in the traditional sense alchemists could not turn lead into gold, curriculum can be reduced and, as Popkewitz (2000) concedes, must out of necessity be abridged to allow for the development of the child. While this may be true, such a process raises a new issue: that is, what material is included and what is excluded within and from curriculum and pedagogy.

The inclusion/exclusion principle

Exclusion of certain curriculum content came to the fore with the notion of the null curriculum, which explicitly examines what has been omitted (Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986). Flinders, Noddings and Thornton (1986) acknowledged two primary dimensions of the null curriculum: the intellectual processes (which equate to pedagogy); and subject matter (which equates to content). Since some knowledge must be excluded, certain classes of people are privileged over others by this selection. For that reason, class and social strata are fundamental categories in the scrutiny of inclusion/exclusion (Popkewitz, 2000). These categories are used to create and identify boundaries between members and non-members (Popkewitz, 2000). An illustration is the category of 'disadvantaged', where boundaries must be specified for membership. Disadvantaged groups are excluded from status and privilege through systems of recognition and divisions, which are constructed in such as way as to be seemingly indiscriminate, natural and disjoined from any group (Popkewitz, 1998). To that end, the politics of inclusion and exclusion are an important part of modern social theories (Popkewitz, 1997). Of equal importance is the conjoining of inclusion and exclusion as a dichotomous pair. Inclusion has meaning only against the background of what is excluded (Marsh, 1992; Popkewitz, 2000, 2004). From here we

need to look at how rules of inclusion and exclusion are regulated. For Apple (2002), a fundamental contribution is from special grammars that incorporate signs and symbols. Perhaps one of the most pervasive examples in education is the use of slogan systems.

Slogan systems

Language can be very political by nature (Giroux, 1979, 1992) and this is particularly the case particularly slogan systems. Specifically, slogan systems contain ambiguity and vagueness that can mask possible social impacts (Apple, 1992; Popkewitz, 1980). Nevertheless, a slogan cannot be too obscure; it must offer the practitioner some present benefit (Apple, 1992), whilst captivating and grabbing our attention, inducing an air of expectation (Apple, 1992; Popkewitz, 1980). Slogans are very difficult to argue against or to challenge; they are worded carefully to sell hopes and desires (Popkewitz, 1980). In recent reform efforts in Queensland, slogans such as "The Smart State" and "New Basics" have been used to sell an ameliorated curriculum. The slogan "The Smart State" in particular has a ring of inclusiveness as the state that includes all students. It is not the author's intention to be critical of these particular slogans but rather to point out that slogans by themselves do not guarantee what they promise. We must remember that slogans are clever, yet Popkewitz (2000) warns that a mixture of rhetoric and logic is seductive. In reality, though, slogan systems according to Apple (1992) result in compromises of knowledge and norms and values that direct schooling. The true nature of these compromises is well hidden, and they are appropriately termed "the hidden curriculum".

The hidden curriculum

Three curricula identified by Elliot Eisner (1985) are the explicit curriculum (also called the overt or intended curriculum), the null curriculum and the implicit or hidden curriculum (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986). The hidden curriculum represents the outcomes that are not part of what was intended (Lovat & Smith, 1995; Pinar, 1992); it includes values, beliefs, norms and underlying assumptions that are transmitted to students (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986; Marsh, 1992). The hidden curriculum is manifested through everyday practices, rules and rituals (Marsh, 1992); it provides guidance on the nature, type and time spent on learning activities (Lovat & Smith, 1995). On account of the subcutaneous nature of the hidden curriculum, its assumptions along with its effects are rarely questioned or challenged (Marsh, 1992). Nonetheless, its purpose is to reproduce social divisions and maintain hegemony (Pinar, 1992).

These concepts can seem rather vague and abstract; therefore an illustration, or what could be loosely termed a thought experiment, may be useful. The following thought experiment is on a micro level and is an oversimplification, yet its purpose is illustrative. Nevertheless, it contains a context that education professionals are well familiar with.

The dominant teacher and his superior classes

Mr Jones has consistently achieved higher results with his classes than his colleagues. He does this by setting the tests based on what he teaches well or spends more time on. Additionally, he adds little twists to his questions which he covers with his classes that enable them to achieve at a higher level.

This simple thought experiment illustrates many of the aforementioned concepts. Mr Jones maintains his *hegemony* through the way that he teaches, and by the examinations that he sets. This allows him to *reproduce* his dominance continually compared with his colleagues, and the superiority of his classes compared with the others. The *resilience of the institution* allows him to test continually in such an unfair fashion. *Knowledge is not neutral*; it is carefully selected to benefit Mr Jones's classes by careful choice of the *inclusion/exclusion* of particular material. Mr Jones's *hidden curriculum* uses twists in questions as a dividing practice to separate his classes from others. Attempts at *resistance* by colleagues or other students such as the unfairness of the tests could be met with *slogan systems* such as "everyone did the same test". Such rhetoric is used to gain the pretence of equality, while in reality masking the unfair nature of such practices. At a broader level, the complexities increase significantly. Nonetheless, the above illustration provides many similarities to Meadmore's (1993) historical study of the dividing practices of examinations in Queensland. Meadmore (1993) noted that country students were disadvantaged in that they did not have teachers with the experience of their city counterparts, who better understood the 'tricks' of the examination. Consequently, when it comes to curriculum reform, there are many complexities and political interests at stake.

Curriculum reform

Considering the complex political nature of curriculum is of particular importance in cases of reform. Reform tends to be reactionary, a response to some sort of crisis (e.g., economic crisis, perceived falling standards, poor literacy or numeracy levels) (Popkewitz, 2000). Education, and teachers in particular, are often blamed as the cause of this crisis regardless of whether it is economic or cultural in nature (Apple, 1992; Pinar & Bowers, 1992). That said, in reality, education does not have a simple one to one relationship with the economy and schools are not the major cause of economic problems (Apple, 1992; Pinar & Bowers, 1992). Yet by blaming education dominant groups can escape responsibility for their own decisions by diverting the focus away from their own accountability (Apple, 1992). Curriculum change is thus designed to create some sort of sociocultural change (Reid, 1978). often in response to a crisis.

Reforms tend to de-contextualise curriculum by ignoring the political and ideological context, instead focusing on technical aspects of change (Giroux, 1985; Pinar, 1992). In the process of de-contextualising curriculum, a number of problematic assumptions are made. Firstly, there is the assumption that teachers will follow the intended curriculum (Marsh, 1984). Secondly, schools are called on to respond to uncertain social and economic changes while creating a harmony between social and educational change (Popkewitz, 2000). Problematic assumptions can also be unique to a specific reform. For example, the assumption that centralised curriculum is necessary for curriculum coherence was challenged with research by Schmidt and Prawat (2006), who found that this is not automatically the case. Instead, they found that specification of year level specific goals and examination content were the underlying features of curriculum coherence. To help clarify the problematic nature of such assumptions, Popkewitz (2000) contrasts the logic of practice (practical considerations) with the practice of logic (theoretical considerations). Understanding these problematic assumptions as well as the context of curriculum reform makes more sense of the haphazard and contradictory nature of curriculum implementation as outlined by Halpin (1990). Another case noted by Pinar (1992) is the paradox of

freedom associated with greater teacher autonomy coupled with the restriction of standardised examinations.

In short, the de-contextualising of reforms results in problematic assumptions that cannot be ignored regardless of which theory of change is adopted. Functionalism analyses the basic structures of society, examining causes and effects of social equilibrium, as well as the roles of individuals (Lovat & Smith, 1995; Reid, 1978). As a consequence, if assumptions about teachers or structures such as institutions are based on shaky premises as discussed, the actual change will be incongruent with the intended change. Functionalism as a theory of change tends to be more consistent with traditionalist perspectives of curriculum. On the other hand, conflict theories of change tend to deal more with issues of power, status and reproduction than with reactionary behaviour (Lovat & Smith, 1995; Reid, 1978). While conflict theories tend to have a greater degree of contextualisation, they are still problematic in that they rely on a Marxist analysis of schooling when analysing curriculum reform (Lovat & Smith, 1995). In fact, applying a Marxist base is one of the most criticised features of the political contextualisation of curriculum (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995), along with its over reliance on neoliberal individualism (Pinar & Bowers, 1992). Nonetheless, as Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995) are quick to point out, not all scholars in favour of political contextualisation (e.g., Bowers) support or subscribe to the Marxist base–superstructure model when dealing with issues of power in education owing to its failure to examine the more complex power relations within schools.

Traditionalist – reconceptualised debate

The re-historicisation and in particular the increased contextualisation of curriculum are not without their critics. Prior to examining these criticisms, it is necessary to lay a basic framework. Popkewitz (1979), among many other researchers, has not been blind to the tension between objectivist and subjectivist approaches in curriculum research. In his genealogy of curriculum research, Franklin (1999) noted that in the 1930s it was predicted that the scientific paradigm would dominate over the next 40 years. Despite the emergence of modernistic and technical approaches, the domination of the scientific paradigm fell well short of expectations (Franklin, 1999). To be sure, technical but de-contextualised approaches to curriculum gained ascendancy and still exist today with a high level of inertia (Hunkins & Hammill, 1994). These technical de-contextualised approaches that focus on the practical problems of curriculum come under the auspices of the traditionalist perspective (Wraga, 1999a).

By contrast, the aforementioned efforts to increase the context of curriculum are termed "the reconceptualised perspective". These two perspectives are antagonistic towards each other, particularly on the issue of curriculum practice (Wraga, 1999a, 1999b). Ironically both perspectives draw on Habermas's critical theory along with other key scholars such as Dewey (Wraga, 1999a). In brief, Habermas's critical theory is formed on three cognitive interests: 1) Empirical/analytic knowledge for the purpose of technical control; 2) Historical/hermeneutical knowledge for the purpose of understanding meanings; and 3) Critical/self-reflective knowledge for the purpose of developing freedom (Lovat & Smith, 1995). In order to reach true knowledge, one must utilise all three in a progressive manner. Critical theory holds that praxis, which is practice developed from this journey, is the final destination (Lovat & Smith, 1995). It is the nature of praxis that has divided traditionalists and reconceptualists.

From the reconceptualist perspective, Pinar and Grumet's (1982) historical analysis examines the increased tendency to entangle theory with practice, leading to decontextualisation and a narrow focus on technical aspects. In response, a degree of separation between theory and practice is suggested (Pinar & Grumet, 1982). Critics of this approach such as Wraga (1999a) view this separation as a road towards academic elitism, in that the process is self-sustaining because it never solves any problems but simply conceptualises them. Although Wraga (1999a) raises some valid concerns, he oversteps the mark in failing to recognise the important contribution of contextualisation. Moreover, Pinar (1992) advises that politics and experience tend to be overlooked unless theory and practice are separated as identities. Consequently, the relationships between these two identities should be examined (Pinar & Grumet, 1982).

Embracing this contextualisation leads to increasing complexities. While Popkewitz (1992) concedes that this means entering a quagmire, Wraga (1999b) is much more pessimistic, describing the territory entered by reconceptualists as "hopeless". It seems that we are faced with a grim choice. Do we ignore context and keep revisiting the same swamps over and over again as expressed by Bellack (1969), or do we enter the big quagmire, with the risk that we may never fully escape? One thing is certain: we cannot and must not fall into pretence and ignore context, and we must also reject the notion of simple grand narratives in order to embrace complexity (Hunkins & Hammill, 1994). At the same time, we should not discard the foundations built by technical approaches; rather as postmodernists we should embrace multiple paradigms and build on these traditionalist concepts (Hunkins & Hammill, 1994).

Transforming Curriculum Practices through Emergent Meanings

In view of the criticisms of re-conceptualisation and the quagmire that has been entered, the question becomes, "Where do we go from here?". How can we transform curriculum practice with such pervasive and complex political entanglements? Assuredly, it is futile to try to de-contextualise curriculum practice; doing so only thwarts reform efforts through the naïve oversimplification using technical rationales. Pinar and Grumet (1982) purport that, once contextualisation is understood theoretically, it can subsequently be applied to practice. This is evident in the fact that since the mid to late 1980s the focus has developed from political theories (such as reproduction and resistance) to specific matters of political and pedagogical practice (Pinar & Bowers, 1992).

One particular practice that has received a great deal of attention is the role of teachers in curriculum implementation. Giroux's (1994) work in particular has focused on teachers as public intellectuals with the ability to transform practice. Likewise, Brown (2005) notes that teaching is a political activity and teachers interact with the political context. Further, Popkewitz (1994, p. 9) outlined the importance of underlying assumptions in curriculum practices as well as their context: "Curriculum practices are socially constructed with multiple political boundaries whose effects are bound to power relations through which we construct identity".

This concept of power relations being bound to practice is imperative. Power is a complex notion that is controlled through the institutions within which teachers work (Vongalis, 2001). Unfortunately, many reforms tend to push teachers towards

isolation and the avoidance of risk taking pedagogy (Plummer, 2004). As a result it is often very difficult for teachers to be transformative as individuals.

An important and forward looking reform approach in recent years is the Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (IDEAS) project. The IDEAS project was developed by the School Leadership Initiative at the University of Southern Queensland under the leadership of Professor Frank Crowther and the IDEAS team (Varghese, 2001). Since its inception in 1998, the project has spread to many Queensland schools, and in 2002 a national trial was commenced (Andrews & Lewis, 2004). The IDEAS project has three components summarised from Andrews and Crowther (2003) as follows:

1. A five element research based framework for improving school outcomes (strategic foundations, cohesive community, infrastructural design, school wide pedagogy, professional supports)
2. Five phase implementation strategy (initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning, sustaining)
3. Parallel leadership (mutual respect, shared purpose, allowance for individual expression).

IDEAS does not follow the traditionalist perspective of a technical approach to change; instead it is reconceptualistic in its orientation by aiming to understand the broader context, particularly at the local level. Further to this, rather than trying to achieve change as individuals, the IDEAS framework targets change at the institutional level (Andrews & Crowther, 2003). This means that cultures and structures that maintain hegemony and consequently repress disadvantaged groups are challenged with a willingness to transform ideas into action (Andrews & Lewis, 2004). In other words, changes at the school level are not focused at the organisational stratum; rather they are teacher-centred and pedagogy-centred (Andrews & Crowther, 2003; Lewis & Andrews, 2000). In addition, the IDEAS framework targets traditional power structures within schools that associate leadership with top-down hierarchical forms of power (Andrews & Lewis, 2004). Indeed, teachers are seen as leaders who "work with principal leaders, in distinctive yet complementary ways" (Andrews & Lewis, 2004, p. 1).

The IDEAS framework challenges the resilience of institutional structures noted by Popkewitz (1979). It seeks to engender community involvement, challenge the traditional hierarchical structures through parallel leadership and achieve a sense of shared purpose and pedagogy while still respecting individual differences (Andrews & Crowther, 2003; Andrews & Lewis, 2004; Lewis & Andrews, 2000). The IDEAS paradigm shares Giroux's (1994) vision of teachers as intellectuals and professionals, able to transform practice and make a difference to learning outcomes, but only through clear, well-defined research frameworks and collaborative practice (Andrews & Crowther, 2003; Andrews & Lewis, 2004; Lewis & Andrews, 2000; Mostert, 2001). In essence, the IDEAS project provides a unique opportunity to engender change at the institutional level through the collaborative leadership of teachers. Such change is best illustrated through several case studies.

Andrews and Crowther's (2006) study of Ambrose senior high school is particularly interesting. The context of this performing arts school had changed from semi-rural to urban and yet the institutional structures had been resilient, leading to high levels of

disengagement (Andrews & Crowther, 2006). The hidden curriculum and standard pedagogy were challenged by a team of both staff and students in order to build a sense of identity in a student body composed from a diverse geographical area. The outcome was not only a common vision but also a set of transformed school wide pedagogy shared by staff and students (Andrews & Crowther, 2006).

In order to challenge the hegemony of traditional schooling in a Torres Strait school (The Rainbow School), a more culturally appropriate and identifiable school wide pedagogy was adopted based on the metaphorical symbolism of the rainbow (Andrews & Crowther, 2003). This allowed a greater sense of identity and knowledge inclusion of students. Such transformation also helped to break down barriers between school and community by using clearly recognisable Indigenous terms to represent the school's pedagogical approach (Andrews & Crowther, 2003).

Nowhere is the principle of hegemony more perceptible than in disadvantaged schools that have an ethnically diverse population. Curriculum and pedagogy, in particular those designed for students of Anglo-Saxon background, are not necessarily suitable for minority groups. Therefore, as expected, Lewis's (2006) case study of Newlyn public school in the disadvantaged area of Mount Druitt (Western Sydney, New South Wales) discovered the high levels of disengagement, the isolation of staff and the hidden curriculum of despair and hopelessness, where students were excluded from knowledge with low expectations and labels associated with the area of Mount Druitt. To overcome the resilience of the institution, teachers fulfilled the role of pedagogical leaders, challenged the *status quo* and transformed their pedagogical practice (Lewis, 2006). One of the major functions (and successes) of the IDEAS intervention was to form a cohesive school wide pedagogy and break down barriers of teacher isolation (Lewis, 2006).

These case studies illustrate that teachers can make a difference, but only through an innovative, well-researched and supported collaborative framework such as the IDEAS project. The reproduction of the underclass of disadvantaged students can be challenged through transformative pedagogy that gainsays the hegemony of dominant practices and resilient institutions, and adapts to the local context in a fluid and dynamic fashion. This in turn can prevent students from being exposed to a hidden curriculum of low expectations and despair, excluding them from high status knowledge.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper has endeavoured to broaden the context of curriculum and pedagogy in order to look at the issue of why problems in schools such as disengagement, teacher isolation and poor community perceptions continue to recur. In order to make progress, there has been a move on the part of curriculum researchers to re-historicise and increase the context of curriculum. This represents an important development from technical approaches that, although valuable, are also short-sighted in failing to represent the myriad of influences on curriculum. Even though this paper has focused on political aspects of context, it acknowledges that other contextual influences such as gender, race, class and religion are important and worthy of attention. Nevertheless, these other influences cannot be completely separated from the political. Finally, returning to the metaphor of the quagmire that we have entered, let us know at least that we shall not go round in circles revisiting

the same swamp in an endless cycle of despair. While there is still a long way to go in terms of effectively engaging students and implementing curriculum using the best possible pedagogical approaches, progress is being made through innovative revitalisation frameworks such as the IDEAS project. Continued research and refined understanding of the enormous complexities of the contextual influences on schooling are imperative in order to prepare tomorrow's students for a changing world effectively.

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