

# The synoptic textbook today

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# The Synoptic Textbook Today

**(Red.) Für die Weiterbildung der Lehrkräfte gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten spezifische Lehrmittel, die *Synoptic Textbooks*. Der folgende Beitrag untersucht die Frage, wie im Fach der *Curriculum Studies* – Curriculum verstanden als Diskurs –, synoptische Lehrbücher konzeptioniert sein müssen, damit sie mit den spezifischen Lebenserfahrungen von Lehrkräften und deren Schülerinnen und Schülern verknüpft werden können.**

■ William F. Pinar

How can I write about curriculum development after the 1980s Reconceptualization, given that the death of curriculum development made the Reconceptualization of U.S. curriculum studies possible?<sup>1</sup> How can I propose that its audience is classroom teachers when I reported that the reconceptualized curriculum field is typified by «distance from the schools» (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 850)? If the post-Reconceptualization era is defined by the postmodern project of understanding (Slattery 2006; Doll 1993), in what sense can there be «curriculum development» that is simultaneously a form of understanding curriculum? If there can be curriculum development in the United States today, what form shall it take, by what method should curriculum be developed, and towards what ends?

These are among the questions I answer in *The Synoptic Textbook Today*.<sup>2</sup> While their themes differ – from the sexualized figuration of the child to drugs to the internationalization of curriculum studies – their structure illustrates the methods of curriculum development after the Reconceptualization. The primary artifact of such curriculum development is the synoptic text, a genre of particular and historic importance to U.S. curriculum studies (see Pinar et al. 1995, p. 11).

Before the Reconceptualization, curriculum development was primarily procedural, epitomized in the Tyler's (1949) four questions.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-five years after the Reconceptualization, I am proposing curriculum development that is simultaneously substantive and syntactical. The subject matter of such curriculum development is now, in principle, open. I

suggest that it be focused on recent research in the academic disciplines, but from the topics I explore in *The Synoptic Textbook Today* and four other books (referenced below), it is clear that interdisciplinary subjects as well as subjects prominent in popular culture are, from my point of view, legitimate curricular topics.

Neither procedural nor bureaucratic, the syntactical structure of curriculum development today is drawn from, but not limited to, the discipline of intellectual history. I propose the juxtaposition of scholarly summaries to provide classroom teachers glimpses of recent research conducted in the arts, humanities, social and natural sciences, as well as of research conducted in interdisciplinary areas. Such summaries also provide glimpses of topics – such as race – that preoccupy parents, students and teachers alike, but belong to no one discipline or interdisciplinary area. The educational significance of these topics – their capacity to enable teachers and students to study academic knowledge in the public, as well as in the private or subjective, interest – suggests their selection as well as the structures of their juxtaposition in synoptic texts.

As a curriculum developer, I compose synoptic texts to enable public school teachers to reoccupy a vacated public domain, not as «consumers» of knowledge, but as active participants in complicated conversation that they themselves will lead in their own classrooms. In drawing widely but critically from various academic disciplines, from interdisciplinary areas, and from popular culture, the form of curriculum development I propose and demonstrate in *The Synoptic Textbook Today* creates textbooks for teachers who can appreciate that our professional calling is the intellectual reconstruction of the public and private spheres. The audience is the teacher who understands her or his classroom as simultaneously civic squares and rooms of one's own. In such a third space (see Aoki 1990/2005; Wang 2004), students and teachers study academic knowledge not only for its own sake but, as well, to articulate their own self-formation in society at particular historical moments. In doing so, they are taught to articulate their own lived sense of the social sphere in the geophysical world. It is curriculum development that appreciates public education not as publicly funded academic voca-

tionalism, but as the education of the public.

This is a textbook for teachers, then, a synoptic text summarizing research that enables teachers to complicate the curricular conversation in which they and their students are engaged. The textbook becomes a form of curriculum research, less concerned with (although hardly disinterested in) pedagogy<sup>4</sup> than with academic knowledge. As in intellectual history, this form of curriculum research appreciates that «understanding always therefore entails what might be called ... proleptic paraphrase or anticipatory synopsis» (Jay 1988, p. 59). By juxtaposing fragments from various disciplinary traditions, I support students' study from vantage points anticipated, perhaps, by no one discipline, points of view originating from subjective and social experience, and thereby oriented, perhaps, to the future. Situated subjectively and socially between disciplines, then, such synoptic curriculum research proceeds without the usual discursive sanctions provided by disciplinarity. With Kaja Silverman (2000, p. 27), «I am thus obliged to acknowledge what I might otherwise disavow: my discourse is as groundless as desire itself. What I have to offer is only what can be seen from the finite and singular perspective that this vantage point opens up. Other will be able to apprehend what I cannot apprehend: the many perspectives which mine works to close-off.» Within the structure of the textbook, I seek to stage and thereby provoke the complicated conversation that curriculum informed by subjectivity, directed socially.

In a second synoptic text (2006b), one focused on the genealogy of race in the West, I employ a version of what Dror Wahrman (2004, p. 47) characterizes as «repetition in the second degree,»<sup>5</sup> in which I focus on specific «cultural domains that push the argument and its limits in variously revealing ways.» The first domain is ancient Israelite culture, namely Noah and the so-called Curse of Ham (Genesis 9:23), in which racialization is retroactively realized; the second is the crisis of late nineteenth-century European masculinity and the case of Daniel Paul Schreber, including Freud's engagement with it; the third is the history and culture of circumcision, the mark of the covenant; the fourth is coming-of-age rituals in the South Pacific, the cultural complements to circumcision in which the sexual side of the sacred is exposed; and the fifth, traces of these four domains in contemporary representations of race in literary and popular culture. Juxtaposing these five domains creates a pattern – a collage, however weak – pattern that points, I argue to the incestuous genealogy of whiteness and of the racism it requires.

Despite my pedagogical good intentions, this strategy recalls what Wahrman identifies as the «most problematic methodological quagmire of cultural history,» which he describes as the «difficulty» of the «weak collage.» Identifying «seemingly similar phenomena in several disparate cultural spheres at the same historical moment,»

Wahrman worries, the historian declares them a «pattern of historical significance» (Wahrman 2004, p. 44). My claim here is that the pattern this textbook reveals holds *educational* significance, but the dangers of associating different phenomena in disparate cultural spheres during different historical moments are, I trust, obvious. Serious students will return to the original texts themselves in order to study the singular elements comprising this synoptic collage.

Like W. J. T. Mitchell (1994, p. 417), I have assembled *Race, Religion and a Curriculum of Reparation* as one might fashion a «photograph album,» inspired by what Kaja Silverman (2000, p. 62) describes as an «ethics of desire – an ethics grounded in a passion for symbolization, in a delight in the manifold and ever new forms that the past can assume.» This synoptic text is a «collection» of «snapshots» of (glances at) whiteness, a textbook addressed, especially, to white men who wish to study the stereotypical in themselves. As Mitchell says of his own, if the «book has a unity, it has been in its insistence on staying for the many answers to its few questions» (1994, p. 417) of whiteness. After Mitchell, I ask, what if we thought of whiteness, itself a form of representation, «not as a homogeneous field or grid of relationships governed by a single principle, but as a multi-dimensional and heterogeneous terrain, a collage or patchwork quilt assembled over time out of fragments. Suppose further that this quilt was torn, folded, wrinkled, covered with accidental stains, traces of the bodies it has enfolded» (Mitchell 1994, p. 419). These stains are not, of course, accidental; they are traces of enslaved and mutilated black bodies.

Such a model of whiteness might make materially visible the genesis of racism, whiteness as, I argue, deferred and displaced self-same desire. Stripped from its originary setting, whiteness becomes intelligible as an «ongoing process of assemblage, of stitching in and tearing out,» mutating into a «multi-dimensional and heterogeneous terrain,» disguised even as interracial homosocial friendship. Still following Mitchell (see 1994, p. 410), I ask what if we thought about whiteness, not as a noun but as a verb, structuring a set of relationships? «Suppose,» he continues, «we de-reified the *thing* that seems to «stand» before us, «standing for» something else,» and thought of whiteness «as a process in which the thing is a participant, like a pawn on a chessboard or a coin in a system of exchange?» Like this expansive and dynamic notion of representation, such a conceptual move would construe whiteness as «roughly commensurate with the totality of cultural activity,» including «that aspect of political culture which is structured around the transfer, displacement, or alienation of power – from «the people» to «the sovereign,» the state, or the representative, from God to father to son in a particular system, from slave to master in an absolutist polity» (Mitchell 1994, p. 410).

Such «cultural activity» is the sea in which we swim, out of which we might articulate our «language of desire». When we speak this language, Silverman tells us, we come to «understand» that the «past is not yet fully written» ... thereby releasing us from the «paralysis of being» into the «mobility of becoming» (Silverman 2000, p. 67)

Curriculum development after the Reconceptualization, then, supports passionate intellectual classroom practice that promises to release us from paralysis as it engages our worldliness (Miller 2005). Such practice is committed to the understanding, through the school subjects, of teachers' and students' own ongoing self-formation within local cultures in an era of globalization. It is a passionate intellectual practice committed to the articulation, for oneself and with others, the educational significance of the school subjects for subjective and social experience in the ever-changing historical moment on an endangered plant. Such practice – intellectual forms of communicative action – might enable teachers and students to understand and develop the school curriculum.

- 1 U.S. curriculum studies was reconceptualized during the 1970s from a bureaucratic field concerned with protocols of practice (intended to improve institutional practices incrementally: see Tyler, footnote 3, below) to an intellectual field structured by «discourses» intended to contribute to the understanding of curriculum: historically, politically, in terms of race and gender, phenomenologically, in terms of post-modernism and post-structuralism, autobiographically, theologically, and internationally (see Pinar et al. 1995).
- 2 The most common curricular artifact in U.S. public schools, textbooks provide summaries of the school subjects organized, presumably, according to the developmental level of students: Biology 10 (referring to the 10th year of schooling), for instance. In U.S. curriculum studies, synoptic texts (textbooks summarizing past and recent scholarship for practicing teachers returning to the University for additional coursework) have played a key role in the intellectual formation of the field (see, for example, Marshall et al. 2006).
- 3 Ralph Winfred Tyler (1902–1994) has been characterized as the most influential curriculum specialist in the history of the U.S. field, his *Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949) characterized as the field's «bible» (Jackson 1992, p. 24). The heart of Tyler's «basic principles» consists of four questions (to which he devotes separate chapters), which as Jackson points out, «a goodly number of today's curriculum specialists, thanks to Tyler, probably know by heart» (ibid., p. 25). These four questions are:
  1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? [Objectives]
  2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? [Design]
  3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized? [Scope and Sequence]
  4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? [Evaluation].
 [Tyler's Buch wurde 1973 von der 1971 erschienenen 31. Auflage in die deutsche Sprache übersetzt und erschien unter dem Titel *Curriculum und Unterricht*. Die vier Hauptfragen lauten: 1. Welche pädagogischen Zwecke

sollte die Schule anzustreben versuchen? 2. Wie können Lernerfahrungen ausgewählt werden, die wahrscheinlich zum Erreichen dieser Lehrziele nützlich sind? 3. Wie können Lernerfahrungen für wirksamen Unterricht organisiert werden? 4. Wie kann die Wirksamkeit von Lernerfahrungen beurteilt werden? Anm. der Red.].

- 4 In the U.S. tradition (even in Shulman 1987, I would argue), «pedagogy» (or teaching or instruction) has been separated from «curriculum» (or «content» or «knowledge»), and behavioralized as what teachers «do,» i.e. «technique» or «action.»
- 5 By «repetition in the second degree,» historian Dror Wahrman «demonstrates» his argument about self-formation in eighteenth-century England by restating it through analyses of four different cultural domains, moving from theater and fashion to learned classical translations and moralizing jeremiads. In *Race, Religion and a Curriculum of Reparation*, I repeat my argument – namely, that «race» is derived genealogically from «gender» and, specifically, from sexual difference within men – in the domains listed above in the main text.

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