And Then There Is This Thing Called the Curriculum: Organization, Imagination, and Mind

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Despite the long history of curriculum studies in the American Educational Research Association, few past presidents have used their presidential addresses to speak about the curriculum and its importance in education research and teaching. In this essay, I examined the presidential addresses (and paper) of three well-known curriculum theorists—Harold Rugg, Maxine Greene, and Eliot Eisner—to share their perspectives on the curriculum as a vehicle for public discourse and democratic engagement. The essay ends with a challenge to AERA members to continue to use the study of curriculum as a vehicle for democracy, civic participation, and a more equitable and just society.

Keywords: curriculum; historical analysis; mathematics education; reading; science education; social studies education

It did not occur to me before I agreed to write this essay for the Centennial Issue of *Educational Researcher* that there would be so few presidential addresses that directly addressed the topic of curriculum. Curriculum is the "stuff" of schooling—school subjects such as English, Spanish, geometry, world history, or physical education—as well as the connective tissue of co-curricular activities like band, sports, debate team—and the invisible structures that Michael Apple (2004) and Thomas Dreeben (1968/2002) identified as factors that create the school environment. These invisible factors include those things that are learned but not openly taught. For example, a student who walks into an urban school and passes through a metal detector may learn that the environment is perceived to be dangerous. On the other hand, a student in a suburban school with acres of land and state-of-the-art facilities may learn that the community embraces and supports her and expects her to succeed. Each of these things—the explicit curriculum, the co-curriculum, and the hidden curriculum—reflects what students can expect to experience under the aegis of the school. But, few American Educational Research Association (AERA) presidents have taken up the curriculum as the primary focus of their addresses to the education research community.

Before selecting which of the presidential addresses to read and comment on, I did a little homework on the "state of curriculum" within AERA. The organizational home for curriculum in AERA is Division B: Curriculum Studies. Division B is the Association's second oldest division as the Association moved away from one largely focused on educational administration. Over the past 5 years (2011–2015), the division has represented about 6% of the overall Association membership with between 1,866 and 1,991 members. Division B is 9th of 12 divisions in member size, just above Division E: Counseling and Human Development, Division F: History and Historiography, and Division I: Education in the Professions. Somehow the place of curriculum seems to be fading even among education researchers. To be fair, AERA is a *research* association and not restricted to practice. Research issues involving curriculum history, curriculum theory, and curriculum studies are central to the division but often appear in more specific special interest groups such as mathematics, science, literacy, or social studies. However, giants in the field of curriculum like Michael Apple, Herbert Kliebard, and Philip Jackson regularly engaged the political, social, economic, and cultural shifts the curriculum has taken both in the United States and throughout the world.

While some may not agree with my assessment, examining 100 years of AERA presidential addresses seemed to point to the shrinking influence of curriculum as a site of research inquiry.[1] There was a very limited number of AERA presidential addresses devoted to curriculum. Among the almost 100 presidential addresses (and presidential year papers or addresses), only 7 could be considered directly related to curriculum. Unfortunately,

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Educational Researcher, Vol. 45 No. 2, pp. 100–104
DOI: 10.3102/0013189X16639042

those 7 papers tend to be fairly subject specific (e.g., "the ability to place the decimal point in division," "how shall we subtract?," "new issues in teaching reading," "principles of method in elementary English composition," "speech and spelling," "physical education? help?," and "an evaluation of the introductory physics course on film") and do not speak to the broad implications of the curriculum on the experiences of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Even at the height of curriculum wars when federal monies were funding curriculum projects like the Science Curriculum Improvement Study (SCIS), the Elementary Science Study (ESS), Science: A Process Approach (SAPA, sponsored by AAAS), and Man: A Course of Study (MACOS), AERA seemed silent about the federal role in the development of the curriculum.

Because of the dearth of curriculum AERA presidential addresses, my approach to this essay was to identify past presidents who are known leaders in curriculum theory, history, or development whether or not they decided to attend to curriculum issues in their presidential addresses. I have chosen the papers from Presidents Harold Rugg, Maxine Greene, and Eliot Eisner. I have the advantage of having known the latter two—Eliot Eisner as a teacher and mentor and Maxine Greene as a colleague and friend. However, all three presidents provided addresses (or papers) that engaged the curriculum from complex and multifaceted perspectives.

Harold Rugg: Organizing the Curriculum

Harold Rugg (1886–1960) began his career as a civil engineer with a degree from Dartmouth College. However, he went on to study psychology, sociology, and education at the University of Illinois and later became a professor at the University of Chicago followed by an appointment at Teachers College, Columbia University. Rugg was one of a group of "reconstructionist progressives" that included John Dewey, Boyd H. Bode, William H. Kilpatrick, and John Childs, all of whom were at Teachers College for a time. He is noted for having created the first textbook series, *Man and His Changing Society*, that was a junior high social studies series published in 14 volumes from 1929 to the 1940s. Rugg was known as a social reconstructionist and progressive educator, and as a result of a well-orchestrated attack by the Advertising Federation of America and the American Legion, he was branded "pro-socialist" for his decision to write books that showed the less than positive aspects of American society. Rugg's books were pulled from many school districts and censored. Prior to this controversy, Rugg served as president of the American Educational Research Association from 1921 to 1922 while a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. For the purpose of this essay, I re-read Rugg's, "Needed Changes in the Committee Procedure of Reconstructing the Social Studies" (Rugg, 1921). On the surface, this seems to be a somewhat narrow (and prescriptive) paper about how curriculum committees should be organized. However, closer reading indicates that Rugg had more expansive notions about the usefulness of curriculum committees in setting the tone for what should be taught in the nation's schools. This paper was published before Rugg had become persona non grata in U.S. education.

Rugg's paper asks an important question that we should continue to consider in the 21st century—"How shall the content of the course (i.e., curriculum) be determined?" Rugg posed these questions as the basis of a series of studies he was undertaking. He began his argument by stating "standards" can be more than empirical and can include what he called "the criterion of 'social worth'" (Rugg, 1921, p. 697). He also indicated he was conducting a study of the "extent to which our existing curriculum in history, geography, and civics [remember Rugg was a social studies educator] deals with vitally important problems of contemporary life, with crucial economic, social, and political 'laws' and relationships, and with established models of living" (Rugg, 1921, p. 698).

Rugg (1921) bemoaned the impotent and lackluster approach to the social studies curriculum as he stated, "existent curriculums largely fail to deal with problems, vital either to contemporary society or to the growth of our national life" (p. 698). But, he had great faith a national committee with a "scientific program" could answer some of the curriculum challenges of his day. Rugg was a realist, however, who posed the question, "What can a committee confidently recommend, then, with respect to these intricate problems of grade placement and organization of subject matter?" (p. 702). His answer was a succinct, "Nothing, at the present time." But he did believe that experimentation and careful investigation could yield a positive result. He was encouraged by the psychological work that was contributing to our understanding of learning and adamantly against the haphazard construction of "curriculum committees" by associations to determine the content of the curriculum. Instead, he wanted committees that were willing to look at innovations and experiments in a systematic way that might lead toward reworking and reinventing curriculum.

Maxine Greene: Imagining the Curriculum

I learned of the iconic Maxine Greene (1917–2014) while a graduate student in curriculum and teacher education at Stanford University. But, my real-life up-close experience with her came on a book project where 11 academic women were asked to write about their research and their lives (Peterson & Neumann, 1997). As a part of the editorial process, we were asked to read and comment on each other's chapters. At the AERA annual meeting before the volume was published, we participated in a symposium about the project. I remember Maxine being quite lavish in her praise of my chapter, but my words and experiences seemed so limited next to hers. Her chapter was stunning. It had not occurred to me that the great Maxine Greene had ever struggled in the academy. She earned her PhD in 1955 and struggled to find a tenure track position. In one instance, she was told that she was clearly the better candidate for the job but her competitor was a man who needed to take care of his family. Maxine was a woman with a husband to "take care of her." She was told to go home and raise a family! Fortunately for us, she did not let the sexism of the era keep her from pursuing what would become a brilliant academic career.

It was no surprise that Maxine Greene's presidential address, "Public Education and the Public Space," was more philosophical and artistic than solely curriculum theory. In it, Greene (1982) raised questions about the ability of public education to do the job it was created to do. "It is obvious that faith in the

promise of public schools has eroded, along with confidence in what they can offer to the young" (p. 4). Like Rugg, Greene raised concerns about the value of the education we are providing our students and its relevance to their real lives. She stated, "Almost never is there an expressed concern about the public realm: there is silence about renewing the common world and about what that common world should be" (p. 4). Like Rugg, Greene's address shows the influence of Dewey, but more than the focus on experience, she pulls on Dewey's notion of democracy and the school as a site of democratic practice. In her description of the increased alienation and disaffection that students were feeling in schools as they were constituted in the early 1980s, she looks to Dewey's notion of the "great community." Unfortunately, Greene argued, the lack of community Dewey sought to create was now interrupted by media messaging that manipulated images and created a "stark rationality" that never invited critique or debate. Instead of understanding issues, ideas and perspectives arrive via media as prepackaged symbols and representations.

Like Rugg, Greene was concerned with the lack of active engagement schools were offering students. Where Rugg believed this might be overcome with curriculum organization, Greene seemed to imply the remedy was to be found in curriculum imagination. She raised questions about our work, "maintaining a society of quiet ones, of mere 'job-holders' and consumers" (Greene, 1982, p. 5). And, she asserted, "To rear a generation of spectators is not to educate at all" (p. 5). Greene seemed deeply concerned about the place of the public school in the public space. Rather than worry about the specifics of course content or scope and sequence, she called for an expansive view not unlike that of her colleague R. Freeman Butts (1980) in a quest for "civic learning." She asserted the need to "see imagination released and openings found in the arts, so that new languages can be explored and new perspectives opened, and so that young people will be enabled to look out beyond the actual and the given and summon into being alternative worlds" (Greene, 1982, p. 9). Thus, Greene was not overly concerned with the "stuff" of curriculum but the curriculum as possibility—as a form of imagination.

Eliot Eisner: The Curriculum and the Mind

My very first quarter as a Stanford University graduate student found me in a class with Eliot Eisner (1933–2014). He was the epitome of the notion *erudite*. But he had easily adapted to California living, and it was not unusual to see him zipping around Palo Alto in his red convertible. No, he was not a crunchy granola kind of man. He liked living well and surrounded himself with fine art. He began his professional life as a painter but quickly changed his interest to teaching art. In his address he says, "I moved from painting to teaching because I discovered that the children with whom I worked, economically disenfranchised African Americans living on Chicago's West Side, became more important to me than the crafting of images" (Eisner, 1993, p. 5). Eisner (1993) further asserted, "for some reason I came to believe then, as I believe now, that the process of image-making could help children discover a part of themselves that mostly resides beneath their consciousness" (p. 5).

Eisner's (1993) presidential address, "Forms of Understanding and the Future of Educational Research," argues that "experience is the bedrock upon which meaning is constructed and that experience in significant degree depends on our ability to get in touch with the qualitative world we inhabit" (p. 5). He further argued, "the curriculum is a mind-altering device" (p. 5). The notion of curricula as "doing something" was what Carter G. Woodson (1933) argued when he said the same curriculum that tells the oppressor that he is everything and superior tells the "Negro" that he is nothing and inferior.

A more recent example of the "work" of the curriculum was evident when the Bard College Prison Initiative (BPI) was featured on the news magazine show, *60 Minutes*. BPI sends Bard professors to a New York prison where they offer college courses in arts and sciences. The interviewer suggested that courses in philosophy or Shakespeare were "wasted" on prisoners and that they would be better served by vocational or trade courses. One of the inmates responded that if the prison offered vocational courses he would probably enroll in them. However, taking those courses may or may not prepare him for a job that may or may not exist when he was finally released from prison. However, he insisted taking a philosophy course was "doing" something to his mind.

Most of the Eisner (1993) address speaks to the way representation and experience are central to thinking. However, he uses representation in an expanded way that speaks to the "process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so that they be stabilized, inspected, edited and shared with others" (p. 6). He goes on to say, "Experience, however, is private. For experience to become public, we must find some ways to represent it" (p. 7). While most of Eisner's presidential address focuses on new ways to represent education research, I was struck by his assertion that

> Curriculum development as a form of educational research is also likely to be influenced by an expanding vision of the forms of understanding schools can foster. Film, video, narrative, dance, music, the visual arts, as well as more proportionally formulated descriptions of events all have the potential to reveal aspects of the world we want students to understand. (p. 9)

For Eliot Eisner, there is no curriculum without a sense of the mind that can be, indeed will be, shaped by how it is represented and experienced.

The Place of Curriculum in AERA's 100-Year History

As I began this essay, I reflected on the muted place of curriculum in AERA presidential addresses. This is not to suggest that we have not had exceptional curriculum theorists both lead and participate in the Association. Rather, from the presidents' viewpoint, curriculum seemingly has taken a back seat to questions of "the state of education research" or "research methods debates." In some ways, I think that the Association presidents struggled to strike the right balance on questions of curriculum. Some thought that we could only speak to very specific aspects of curriculum like how to teach basic skills like reading or mathematics while others thought the curriculum

could only be engaged at a macro level. Richard Anderson (1984), who was president from 1983 to 1984, gave an address titled "Some Reflections on the Acquisition of Knowledge," and he was followed by Lee Shulman (1986), whose address was "Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching." Both addresses spoke to the nature of knowledge and by default the curriculum in some ways. These were more macro-level discussions about the workings of curriculum. Somehow, AERA presidents have not spoken to the "meso level" or "sweet spot" of curriculum from the perspectives of schools and researchers. The address that seems closest to hitting that sweet spot is the one in 2001 given by Catherine Snow, "Knowing What We Know: Children, Teachers, Researchers," where she engaged multiple levels of teaching and learning.

Interestingly, 1983 (the year of the Anderson presidency) was the same year the Commission on Excellence in Education released its infamous *Nation at Risk* report that critiqued the "cafeteria style" approach to the secondary school curriculum and argued that what was taught in U.S. schools lacked rigor or coherence. However, instead of focusing on the specifics of curriculum, the major school reform efforts went toward "raising standards." Curriculum efforts that did take root came out of the professional associations like the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). AERA was relatively silent on matters of curriculum, and perhaps as a research association, that was its proper role.

Curriculum in AERA's Future

What is the place of curriculum research in AERA's future? Certainly the Association will maintain a division (Division B) with a focus on curriculum. But how robust and relevant will curriculum debates be as we move deeper into the 21st century? For far too long, schools, society, and even some education researchers seem to have treated curriculum as a settled issue. It is true that we have had eras of curriculum expansion—particularly in the 1960s with the emergence of what Sylvia Wynter (1995) called "New Studies"—Black Studies, Chicano Studies, American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, and Women's Studies. Wynter posited that these new studies would change the shape and form of the curriculum because of the transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary ways they were shaped and articulated. Instead of focusing on the "history" or "literature" of a group, the new studies focused on the "experiences" of a people and looked at those experiences across traditional boundaries. One might read history or literature, consume art, produce music, and create various representations of the experience. For example, Chicano Studies might include *cuentos* and *consejos*. American Indian Studies might require a sweat lodge experience. African American Studies might expand throughout the diaspora and take in knowledge and experiences from Africa, the Caribbean, and South America in addition to the United States.

The New Studies movement required scholars to rethink disciplines, disciplinary boundaries, and approaches to curriculum. Unfortunately, this type of curriculum making is difficult to sustain when existing institutions insist on maintaining typical curriculum structures. So instead of revamping the curriculum, New Studies were seen as mere curriculum proliferation and a proliferation that was ideologically tainted (Graff, 1993). Because the New Studies courses came out of political struggle, they were relegated to the fringes of the K–12 curriculum.

Although New Studies continue to build and grow in the academy in the form of departments (African American Studies, Chicano Studies, American Indian Studies, Ethnic Studies, Gender Studies, etc.) and programs, they receded from the K–12 curriculum. Often K–12 curriculum planners experienced a social backlash that resulted in the development of a "back to basics" approach to the curriculum. Claiming that the curriculum was out of control, school districts across the nation began to focus primarily on reading and mathematics, especially in schools serving low-income, low-achieving students. The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) helped to underscore the need for basic skills in schools serving poor children. There was no room for what was perceived to be "curriculum frills."

In the reauthorization of ESEA known as No Child Left Behind, President George Bush built on the growing standards and accountability movement and required more standardized testing in Grades 3–8 and Grade 10. This "get tough" approach insisted on schools making "Adequate Yearly Progress" or face sanctions such as principal and teacher reassignment, reorganization, closure, and state takeover. Although education researchers pointed out the demand for 100% proficiency by the year 2014 was not possible (Linn, 2003), school districts focused on it. As a result, the curriculum became even more stripped down in urban (and rural) schools where students struggled to pass state-mandated tests.

While more and more schools developed laser-like focus on reading, writing, and mathematics, U.S. schools seemed to be losing ground in international comparisons such as TIMMS and PISA. An entire industry was booming just south of San Francisco, and yet this new "Silicon Valley" could not depend on U.S. public schools to provide the kind of workers it would need. Today, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) curricula reflect the high-status learning that schools claim they want for all students, and once again the vicissitudes of the market and politics shape curriculum offerings. Now the liberal arts (English, Humanities, etc.) and fine arts are fighting for space in the curriculum (Antonucci, 2012).

What to include in the curriculum is not only subject to what is happening in a society, it is also subject to the prevailing conceptions of the curriculum. Eisner and Vallance (1974) argued that there were five competing views of curriculum that made it virtually impossible to create unitary perspectives of curriculum. Those conflicting views were curriculum as the development of cognitive processes, curriculum as technology, curriculum as a site for self-actualization, curriculum as a site for social reconstruction, and as an approach to academic rationalism. The notion of curriculum as the development of cognitive processes more closely reflects what transpires in urban schools. Instead of a focus on rich literature, the arts, and other creative forms of learning, cognitive processes reflect a more skills-based approach. Academic rationalism is what students typically experience in honors and advanced placement courses as well as those who attend elite private school. This approach suggests that there is a "best" set of things to learn. Students in this tradition are

immersed in great books, college preparatory courses, or E. D. Hirsch's "Core Knowledge" curriculum. The other conceptions—self-actualization, curriculum as technology, or self-reconstruction—generally emerge in more boutique, alternative, or specialty schools. Schools like Summerhill or Social Justice High School reflect self-actualization and social reconstruction, respectively. In the self-actualization conception, the curriculum functions to meet the social and emotional needs of individuals who will in turn be productive citizens that benefit the society. In the social reconstructionist conception, the curriculum aims to help students ask (and ultimately answer) questions about social inequity and democracy. This exploration of inequity and democracy is thought to produce critically conscious thinkers who will raise similar questions as adult citizens. The curriculum as technology model is what many online school programs offer. Students work at their own pace acquiring skills and knowledge. Such an approach does not presume the use of machinery (e.g., a computer). One can think to the 1970s "programmed reading" curriculum where students made their way through workbooks in a systematic way to learn word families without the benefit of narrative context. Thus, we struggle to nail down one perspective on curriculum that must serve a diverse, multilingual, multiability school population.

The inherent difficulty in determining what is to be taught is probably the reason why the AERA presidents never seemed to take up the curriculum as the central focus of the presidential addresses. It is too unwieldy and too fraught with political landmines. The curriculum is about the essence of knowledge, and as curriculum theorist Michael Apple (2004) has often asked, we too must ask, "Whose knowledge?"

Perhaps the real future of the curriculum among education researchers will be to defend the right for the curriculum to be fluid and changing rather than fixed and rigid. Perhaps it is time to once again reaffirm John Dewey's notion of a curriculum that emerges from the experiences of the learners. And, such a curriculum will depend heavily on the skill of our nation's teachers. That herculean task is well beyond the ability of education researchers. However, I would argue that curriculum researchers continue to have important contributions to make to the field. Curriculum historians continue to help us see how curriculum decisions of the past influence current practice. For example, Rudolph (2002) demonstrated that our taken-for-granted notion about the improvement of U.S. science education was never the main focus of the Sputnik challenge. Rather, Rudolph points out that the real aim was to increase support for the existing scientists and bolster public spending for space science.

Researchers in curriculum theory will continue to challenge us to consider the contours of the curriculum and how it responds to (or perhaps directs) social issues. Whether it is a response to a perceived lack in scientific knowledge (as in the post Sputnik era), a failure to consider diverse perspectives (as in the 1960s), a view of the society as "losing intellectual ground" (as in international test comparisons such as TIMMS and PISA), or a renewed sense of patriotism (as in the post September 11, 2001 attack), curriculum researchers and theorists will continue to interrogate curriculum questions, decisions, and implementation. My hope is that in the next 100 years, AERA presidents will help invigorate curriculum questions throughout the Association.

NOTE

[1]Perhaps better barometers of the influence of curriculum research in the Association would have been an examination of AERA journals and/or annual meeting programs.

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Manuscript received December 4, 2015
Revision received February 1, 2016
Accepted February 2, 2016