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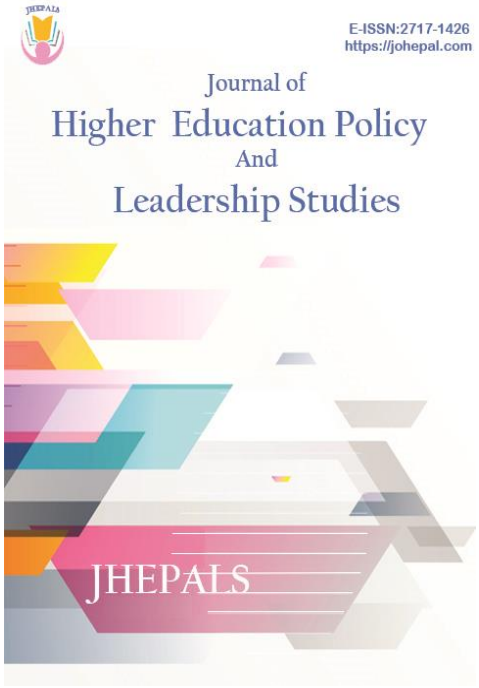

Understanding Curriculum: Interview with Prof. William F. Pinar

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Interview

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William F. Pinar *

Prof. William F. Pinar is the Tetsuo Aoki Professor of Curriculum Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Pinar has also served as the St. Bernard Parish Alumni Endowed Professor at Louisiana State University (LSU), the Frank Talbott Professor at the University of Virginia, and the A. Lindsay O'Connor Professor of American Institutions at Colgate University. He has lectured widely, including at Harvard University, McGill University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison as well as the Universities of Chicago, Helsinki, Oslo, Tokyo, and Vienna. The former President of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies and the founder of its U.S. affiliate, the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, Pinar serves now as the Honorary President of the Association for the Advancement of Interdisciplinary Education Studies: https://aaides.org/.

In 2000 **Pinar** received the LSU Distinguished Faculty Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Educational Research Association; in 2004 he received an American Educational Association Outstanding Book Award for *What is Curriculum Theory*?, the third edition of which was published in 2019 by Routledge. Most recently, with Anne M. Phelan, Pinar is editor of *Curriculum Studies in Canada: Present Preoccupations* (University of Toronto Press).

https://edcp.educ.ubc.ca/william-pinar/

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Pinar, W. F.

JHEPALS has the honor and privilege to publish an exclusive interview with Prof. William F. Pinar as the pioneer and the globally recognized scholar within the realm of *Curriculum Studies*. It is with no doubt that almost all higher education leaders, researchers, students, and practitioners are well acquainted with his works (books, articles, talks, interviews, etc.) to get an enriched understanding of the theories in Curriculum Studies.

We are sure that Prof. William F. Pinar's insightful, illuminating and critical responses enriched with his academic/ leadership experience in higher education and global cooperation will be of interest to a broad audience of international researchers, students, policymakers, and leaders in Higher Education.

Question #1

You and your academic colleagues promoted reconceptualism and theoretically brought the curriculum to a new stage; But it seems that you could not bring this theory into the operational process of the classroom. Therefore, reconceptualism is apparently not known beyond a theoretical issue. Do you accept this criticism? If yes, what should you have done that was not done?

Answer:

Actually, I "promoted" nothing, and certainly not another "ism," as in "reconceptualism." As noted in chapter 12 of *A Praxis of Presence* (2023), I chronicled and attempted to theorize what was underway in the field, namely a shift from site-based curriculum development to university-based efforts to understand curriculum: as historical, as political, as gendered, as racialized, as phenomenological, as discursive (as influenced by post-structuralism), as institutional and as international. To return to your question, the field that was underway – that was being reconceptualized – came to abjure instrumentalism and operationalism, so there was (at least by me) no attempt whatsoever to "bring this theory into the operational process of the classroom." The usurpation of educators' intellectual independence was one our critiques of teacher education and school reform; I – we – had no interest whatsoever in playing the same game (albeit with different concepts). Later – in the 1980s, after the Reconceptualization of U.S. curriculum studies had occurred – there were efforts to theorize "operational process" – namely the so-called "critical pedagogy" of Kincheloe, McLaren, and Giroux, of which I was quite critical, partly due to its determination to "bring this theory into the operational process of the classroom." From the start my allegiance has been to understanding, understanding that for me is always underway, always modifiable, often with unpredictable implications and consequences, including for the classroom.

That curriculum studies in the United States – and even more so in Canada, a field on which I'm working now: https://curriculumstudies.ca/ – is theoretical and not "operational " - is one of its achievements. You may criticize the field for that – of course. I, however, am proud of that accomplishment.

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Question #2

The curriculum suffers from the lack of historical identity, and it seems that reconceptualism could not fix this defect. Why do you think this did not happen? What is the best strategy to solve the problem?

Answer:

Part of this problem of "historical identity" exists in every so-called "professional" field, fields commonly conceived as "applied." Intellectual histories are few, but intellectual histories are precisely what I have labored to provide, starting with the 1995 *Understanding Curriculum* (co-authored with William Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, and Peter Taubman), a book with three chapters on the history of the field, history and internationally with two editions (2003, 2014) of the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, and a series of edited volumes on curriculum studies in Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and South Africa. And, as noted in my reply to question #1, underway in Canada.

Question #3

Is it possible to promote and use the neologism perspective in the curriculum of higher education, which is based on andragogy and heutagogy? If possible, what do you suggest?

Answer:

Neologisms can be useful to the extent they name what had escaped representation by other concepts. The two you cite don't appear to do that. The larger issue – what I've termed "discursive engineering" – is the delusion (accelerated by Foucault's early insistence that concepts can create as well as reflect reality) that by changing the names of things we change the things themselves. Good luck with that.

Question #4

Do you consider deep learning and artificial intelligence(AI) a threat to educational systems and curricula or not? In your opinion, reconceptualism has accelerated or reduced this process? Should reconceptualists change their view of deep learning and artificial intelligence? Why?

Answer:

The jury on AI is still out, but the alarm bells – as you know – are ringing loudly and continuously. Because critiques of technology – and technologization – have been central to the reconceptualized field, curriculum studies scholars in both the US and Canada have cautioned against the uncritical embrace of technology, including AI. See "Indexical Traces of the Real: Teaching in the Techno-Nation State (2022)" in the "World Yearbook of Education 2022: Education, Schooling and the Global Universalization of Nationalism".

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Question #5

In general, can artificial intelligence(AI) be the source of tremendous changes in the future of higher education curriculum? How? What about the internationalization of the curriculum? Please explain and enlighten us?

Answer:

Certainly AI risks the acceleration of student – and scholars' – plagiarism. It might even replace actual flesh-and-blood educators – and students, as machine-to-machine interaction becomes the fundamental floor of what happens (and not "in the world" but in "the Cloud"). Internationalization could be a casualty too, as I chronicle in my chapter (#8) on "Indexical Traces of the Real: Teaching in the Techno-Nation State (2022)" in the "World Yearbook of Education 2022: Education, Schooling and the Global Universalization of Nationalism".

Question #6

According to your experiences and professional records, what major issues do you think educators, researchers and scholars of higher education face today in the field of educational policy? List them and give a brief analysis of these issues?

Answer:

Policy issues differ from country to country, and even from region to region within countries. The problem with "policy" is that it can restrict the intellectual independence of educators. Its' promise is that it can also affirm and perhaps even protect intellectual independence. Of course "independence" isn't absolute, regulated by research in the academic disciplines, professional codes of ethics, and (not always in welcome ways) by colleagues and students. That said, surely AI and technologization generally is an educational issue faced by educators worldwide.

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