

Curriculum Studies “因其固然”:
以 International Instauration 为关头 for
Conceptualizing What “Curriculum Studies” is All About

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What is “Curriculum Studies,” after all? 或 “课程研究” 到底在研究什么对象？

This paper considers the present moment as a critical opportunity (both 关头 and 危机) for the conceptualization of Curriculum Studies as an international field of research and scholarship. One possibility is for us to simply take “课程研究,” “curriculum studies,” etc. as equivalent umbrella terms, together forming a “big tent” to cover all the elements and tendencies existing within scholarly communities around the world that are conventionally regarded as cognates within a broad area of diffuse but vaguely related inquiries. Another possibility would see, in the intermingling of diverse national and language traditions, a confluence with the potential for erupting into new and transformed traditions, enriched by the dialogical fecundity of our emergent international community. This paper presents the merits of yet one other possibility:

I argue for the value of dialogue on the nature of what it is that we are studying, i.e., what is curriculum [or 课程, etc.]? National language traditions are informed by histories of meaning, so that the Latinate “curricula,” for example, resonates with a Latin sense of the courses run by particular runners on particular days in particulars winds (Grumet), yielding an understanding of curriculum as the course of experience actually lived by a particular person, in which school curriculum may be understood as just one sector in the integral curriculum of (a person’s) life (or “Curriculum Vita”). The etymology alone will not sustain such insights when terminology is taken up into dialogue with language traditions that do not share the same philological foundations. The vitality of these insights will be enhanced, however, as they re-emerge from critical dialogue in which they may be understood for their importance to the conceptualization of curriculum, independently of their roots in the Latin language. In dialogue, the latin “currere” (cf. Pinar) may be considered in relation to ideas from other traditions. As a way or path, for example, the Chinese idea of 道 (dao) might be fruitfully considered in relation to the Latin runner’s course. Although the word 道 itself is not seen in “课程,” it figures prominently in no less a curriculum theory text than the Confucian 大学 (四书), which begins as an explication of “大学之道.” Terhart describes the “Educational Reform Era” (1965-1975) in which an Anglo-American “curriculum” tradition developed as against the German *Bildungs-Didaktik*. In like manner, could there be native Chinese dao-oriented (rather than plan-oriented) ways of understanding the object or 对象 of our inquiry, which may have been overshadowed for a time in some quarters by non-Chinese (e.g., Tylerian) traditions?

I look forward to a dialogical exploration of such issues in our newly organized world-wide community. Despite the word-tickling above, however, I propose a dialogue that will not be fixated on traditional usages, but instead, informed by the traditions, will strive for a perspicuous understanding of the nature of what it is that we are studying, and the implications for inquiry attuned to the nature of that reality as-it-is, or “因其固然” (庄子·内篇·养生主第三). The value, and the urgency, of conceptualizing our field on the basis of a critical-realist understanding, and not just affiliation with preferred traditions, will be discussed in terms of how it can empower our efforts in times and places where the quality of education that we cherish is being threatened by developments that depend on conceptual frameworks that deny the essential vitality of curriculum, as it really is, and as it must be understood for practice as well as inquiry.