Spirituality
and Curriculum Reform:
The Need To Engage the World

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Few of us went into education out of a burning desire to raise student test scores. We went into it out of a deep sense of what's good for kids and society, what's worth knowing and thinking about, what it means to be a good citizen and person- indeed, what it means to lead a good life. Philosophy matters.

—David J. Ferrero, 2005

The denial of basic human rights, the destruction of the environment, the deadly conditions under which people (barely) survive, the lack of a meaningful future for the thousands of children I noted in my story,… [this] is a reality that millions of people experience in their bodies everyday. Educational work that is not connected deeply to a powerful understanding of these realities… is in danger of losing its soul. The lives of our children demand no less.

—Michael W. Apple, 1995

Introduction

Ferrero's quote above captures one of the major themes of this essay, namely, that teaching demands a deeper understanding of the purpose and meaning of educators' work, and of themselves in relation to that work. Doing philosophy requires that educators continually inquire into their work, in search of the deeper meanings and authenticity that have the potential to impact children and society. Philosophy does matter. Apple's quote above captures another theme of this essay, namely, the recognition that there are realities (a sociocultural world) outside of education to which educators must pay attention and address through their work for the sake of children. Not understanding these realities makes educational work lifeless, dead, and "in danger of losing its soul." This is the sociocultural reality of teachers' work. In this essay we will develop these two themes by exploring critiques of school practice and what some writers identify as a lack of meaning and purpose within an "externalized" curriculum, such as what is currently exemplified by the

demands of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001). This exploration will provide us with language to explore a conceptual framework for examining how we think about and engage the world, as found in current discussions of "spirituality." We will then examine ideas of curriculum writers who have understood the underlying constructs of "the spiritual," although they did not engage the language of spirituality as it is currently used. We will argue the need for connecting the search for meaning and authenticity found in the language of "spirituality" to the search for meaning and authenticity in the curriculum, and that this search is most powerful, transforming, and sustainable when connected to the sociocultural context.

Critiques of School Practice

We recognize that the sociocultural context of schooling today, as in the past, is fraught with complex issues from outside forces, seemingly beyond the control of educators, who have responded to these forces in technical, instrumental ways that do not address the complex issues. Iannone and Obenauf (1999) describe current school practices as built on a fragmented curriculum which emphasizes memorization, is oriented toward textbooks, sees the teacher as controller, is cognitively based, and evaluated through normative testing. Wringe (2002) adds to our understanding of this curriculum that focuses on the external,

> Education as we currently have it is often presented as essentially concerned with externals, with gradable and above all observable integrative skills, competencies and dispositions, which will enable individuals to become employable, performative and generally acceptable future citizens. In this endeavor the life of the spirit would seem to have little part to play…. (p. 169)

An externalized curriculum requires students to appropriate particular information that is then represented back to teachers for the purpose of measuring the effectiveness of teaching on student learning. This type of curriculum does not involve students with the sociocultural world, nor does it address what is good for society. An externalized curriculum does not engage students and teachers in the search for deeper meanings and authenticity in their work in schools or in their lives outside of school.

A curriculum that is concerned with appropriating information, which we refer to as an externalized curriculum, is not new, but is particularly pervasive in today's schools with the implementation and enforcement of NCLB. Over past decades there have been multiple critiques of externalized curricula. Freire (1970) spoke of "banking education" with its view of the teacher as the narrator and students as receptacles, where participants become anesthetized because of the lack of dialogue and engagement with the world through an epistemological curiosity. Rose (1989) described curricula that "occupied" rather than engaged students and teachers. Purpel (1989) criticized mainstream educational discourse, particularly in its trivial, vulgar, and technical character, as well as its anti-intellectualism (p. x). Apple (1982, 1995) described the impact of an externalized curriculum through the deskilling of

educators as curriculum developers and their reskilling as curriculum managers. Eisner (1979, 1985, 1994, 2002), in *The Educational Imagination*, provided a critique of technical curriculum development. He proposed using an aesthetic paradigm, in contrast to the technical, that would allow teachers to become educational connoisseurs and critics, thus evaluating the expressive outcomes of the curriculum rather than measuring them.

The examples above are certainly not an exhaustive review, but merely a few critiques from the field of curriculum studies. The life of the spirit is not valued in an externalized curriculum (Wringe, 2002). Our instincts tell us there is something more meaningful that we should be doing with education and the curriculum to engage students with the world (Iannone & Obenhauf, 1999). In response, writers in a variety of publications have turned their attention to exploring the concept of spirituality, seemingly as a way of addressing this yearning for something more meaningful in life as well as in the curriculum.

Current Writings on Spirituality

Understanding spirituality can not be accomplished with a simple definition. Spirituality is personal, unique, and individualistic (Wane, 2000). Recent discussions of spirituality range from connectedness to a life force, often influenced by one's contextual or cultural background; to feelings of wholeness, healing, or interconnectedness; to making meaning of one's life; to an ongoing development of self that moves toward greater authenticity or a more authentic identify (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003, p. 374).

In reviewing writings on spirituality and education it is important to establish at the very beginning of our discussion that spirituality does not mean organized religious beliefs as found in present day political discourse. Walton (1996) contrasts religion and spirituality:

> Religion may or may not play a role in individual spirituality and is quite distinct from spirituality….Religion is described as a framework for beliefs, values, traditions, doctrine, conduct, and rituals….Whereas spirituality is a much more encompassing term….a spiritual individual may or may not be religious….Spiritual relationships are defined as relationships to self, others, a higher power, or the environment that bring forth a sense of inner strength, peace, harmonious interconnectedness, and meaning to life. (p. 237)

Tisdell (2001) differentiates spirituality and religion when she defines religion as "an organized community of faith that has written codes of regulatory behavior" (p. 1).

Forman (2004) suggests that spirituality focuses on the inner rather than outer, on the whole or holistic, on connectedness to others and the earth, on the nonrational and the non-linear, and on the subjective rather than objective. Spirituality seeks a connectedness that transcends various religious traditions, which have historically placed boundaries on a sense of community. Further Forman believes

that there is a widespread hunger among people for something which moves beyond structures that have been characteristically divisive. Similar to Forman, Palmer (2003) relates spirituality to the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than one's ego. Palmer (2000) also believes that spirituality becomes a natural vehicle for overcoming the inherent fragmentation between individuals, groups, and institutions.

Tisdell (2003) states "Spirituality is fundamentally about how we make meaning in our lives, particularly as related to our over-all life purpose." (p. 31). She further contends this notion of meaning-making is "always present in the learning environment (although it is often unacknowledged)" (p.29). Like Tisdell, Canda (1988) believes

> …the gestalt of the total process of human life and development…the central dynamic of spirituality is the person's search for a sense of meaning and purpose, which arises from an innate impulse and need to so do…fulfillment of the individual's spiritual potential is dependent upon caring and mutually beneficial relationships with other people and the nonhuman world. (p. 42)

Iannone and Obenauf (1999) relate meaning making to philosophy when they suggest "spirituality is related to a search for a deeper philosophical meaning of life" (p. 737). Yet that search cannot be an intellectual exercise, but rather an active engagment and experiencing of the spiritual.

Spirituality is also described as a search for a more authentic identity, the core self, one that is not defined by others (Tisdell, 2003). For Tisdell, spiritual development "constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self." (p. 29). Tisdell and Tolliver (2003) suggest that

> …part of the spiritual journey is moving toward knowing and operating from this "core self" or more authentic identify, recognizing that given that we are shaped by systems of race, class, and gender; our genetics; our various psychological and biological needs and desires; and others' expectations of us, it is impossible to know this "authentic self" with absolute certainty. (p. 375)

Here authenticity means having a sense that one is operating more from a sense of self that is defined by one's own self as opposed to being defined by other's expectations. However, one never arrives at that authentic self. The paradox of spirituality appears to lie in the moving toward one's more authentic identity at the same time one begins to question the notion of authenticity (Palmer, 1980). Spirituality also leads to an awareness of one's own incompleteness (Freire, 1998). The search for a more authentic self is always a work in progress.

Spirituality and education are related through discussions of transformational experiences. Vella (2000) discusses the notion of a spirited epistemology, a view of transformative educational moments that draw on spirituality. A spirited epistemology is one in which educational events provide movement toward a metanoia, a Greek word meaning a change of mind. If individuals undergo a metanoia they move to a less alienated state and a deeper awareness of themselves and others in which they

are invited further into their own authenticity. Spiritual transformations or metanoia become emancipatory when pluralism and manifestations of spirit within different cultures, traditions, and religions are valued (Lerner, 2000). Emancipatory spirituality, for Lerner, includes an emphasis on working for social justice and the transformation of the world.

In this section we have presented notions of spirituality that represent the diversity of current views ranging from individual and unique to socially emancipatory. In examining the differing positions, we strongly acknowledge the need for individuals to turn inward in the search for meaning and a more authentic self. We want to argue, however, that the inward search is not enough. If this spiritual search is a true metanoia, it should change our way of being in the world, our way of engaging the world.

Spirituality and the Curriculum

The search for meaning/purpose and authenticity is certainly a timely subject within social, political, and educational discourse today, but it is not new for curriculum scholars. There is literature within the area of curriculum studies that concerns itself with larger philosophical questions, which we see as closely related to the search for meaning/purpose and authenticity. In this section we focus on a few examples of how questions that are spiritual in nature have been represented in the work of curriculum scholars.

The 1960s and 1970s produced a broad and dramatic (re)examination of the notion of curriculum and curriculum theory. The scholars involved in this (re) examination of what constituted curriculum work/curriculum theory became known, rightly or wrongly, as the reconceptualists (see Pinar, 1975). These writers posed philosophical and political questions about the nature of the curriculum itself and they moved away from the technical and instrumental language of the curriculum (the externalized curriculum) to a more existential, phenomenological, and social language. It is with this shift that we connect ideas of curriculum writers to the current use of language in discussions of spirituality.

Two major areas of schooling about which curriculum scholars wrote extensively centered on the questions "What are schools for?" (a philosophical question), and "What should we teach?" (also a philosophical question, as well as a central question of curriculum). This philosophical questioning sought to arrive at a deeper sense of the purpose of schooling and the very nature of the curriculum. These questions were concerned with how the school represents curriculum (an embodiment of the world) and how the curriculum defined for students the nature of the world. Certainly these questions were, and still are, problematic. By problematic, we mean that these questions are continually open to discussion and debate.

When Kliebard (1975) identified what he considered to be the central question of the curriculum ("What should we teach?"), he argued the value of asking this

question did not lie in providing a straight forward answer, but rather in further questions and issues raised by the question (the problematic). Kliebard identified four questions/issues raised by the central question which are philosophical in nature: "Why should we teach this rather than that?, Who should have access to what knowledge?, What rules should govern the teaching of what has been selected? and, How should the various parts of the curriculum be inter-related in order to create a coherent whole?" Kliebard's questioning provides a good example of how complex schooling really is. In contrast to the reconceptualists, many education writers, consultants, professors, textbook publishers, etc., however, *did* provide straight forward responses to the question "What should we teach?" In doing so, we believe they oversimplified the complexity of schooling, reducing discussions of schooling to very technical, pseudo-scientific responses to curriculum development (an externalized curriculum), responses devoid of the spiritual.

The essay entitled "Poetry and Power: The Politics of Curricular Development," presented at a meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) by Dwayne Huebner (1975) is an excellent example of the criticism of the technical, instrumental curriculum (externalized) and the disconnect between teachers' personal work and the larger sociocultural context. In the essay, Huebner starts with the questions "Fellow educators- are we not lost? Do we know where we are, remember where we have been, or foresee where we are going?" At the time, he argued that educators had lost touch with their educational history, their history of talking about "education for individuals" and they were jumping on the "bandwagons" of change, and these changes left them separated from themselves because the bandwagons were not their beliefs about schooling. He asked

> Why do we not comport ourselves in such a manner that our center- our sense of who we are and what we are about- can be restored and reformed?… Why do we not pause to feel the painful tensions and pulls in us, which are reflections of the tensions and pulls of our society? Why do we not notice more carefully the direction of technical changes, social changes, and political changes? (p.130)

This sense of "being lost" and out of touch with their educational past suggested a lack of understanding of purpose. Without this sense of purpose, without the sense of who they were and what they were about, they became disconnected from their inner beliefs and practices. They were alienated from themselves because they were implementing someone else's view of schooling, and they did not recognize the societal issues around them. The void was filled by practices dictated by others. Huebner (1975) continued, "It is far easier or safer to proclaim the individual and to then fit ourselves into a prepared slot: buy someone else's package of objectives, materials, and bets; or put on someone else's alternative school. Then if we fail, it is someone else's fault, not ours" (p 131).

In suggesting that educators were lost, Huebner (1975) meant that educators had let the schools become the center of their life. Yet the schools were not theirs, but

rather someone else's institution. He reminded educators that education was a political activity and that the schools were one way to organize power and influence. He believed that educators needed to recognize that the struggle to remake the school was a struggle to make the world a more just place. "If the school is a vehicle of political activity, then our lack of clarity, our lack of vision about the school is a function of our lack of clarity and vision of our public world—a breakdown in our talk, our poetry, about the world we make" (p. 131). We believe Huebner correctly identified what happens when educators are unable to connect their work with the larger society. In making schools the center of their life, the language they used to talk about schooling had only to do with school issues, and was unrelated to the broader sociocultural and political reality. In other words, they were unable to connect their personal and professional life to any context other than the school.

The result of "being lost" shows the divide between the world of schooling and the public sphere. Huebner (1975) is worth quoting at length:

> We do not talk about a more just public world; we talk about school, we think about school, and we see the world through the windows and doors of the school. The school has become our place. We have become school people, our language of learning, discipline, motivation, stimulus, individualization, is school language. Our images for generating new educational possibilities are school images. So we seek more diversified and smaller packages of instructional materials, not greater public access to information without federal control, or better development of cable television for neighborhood use. We seek open classrooms, not open societies. We seek alternative schools, not alternative worlds. And because we are school people our public statements affirm the school, defend the present public school, and hide social injustice. Our propaganda of individualism is liberal cant that hides the basic conservatism of school people and permits those who control our public world to continue to control it. Our public statements are not socially or personally liberating. They do not excite us to imagine more just public worlds. They do not harness the power of people in the political struggle to reform our present inequitable institutions. They do not enable men or women to recognize and grasp their political right to share in the maintenance and reforming of our public world. (p. 131)

In this quote Huebner suggested that when we have only school language, we do not have language that allows us to engage our work within the larger sociocultural context. Not having a language to engage the world keeps us from asking the deeper questions, exploring our lives as educators beyond the surface.

Huebner (1975) captured the technocratic side of education—an education devoid of the spiritual. His essay could have been written today when there appears to be a disconnect between the inner self of the teacher and the outer self, the teacher's situatedness within the social and political context. Immersed only in the language of schooling, teachers are unable to "read" the times. Or, perhaps, they can read the times, but feel powerless (in the sense of not knowing what to do) in the face of the overwhelming social and political conditions in which they find themselves.

Huebner's ideas were not couched in the language of spirituality; however, the

splits and fractures he identified, the disconnect between the practice and the lived experience of teachers' work, suggests a social orientation identified in current discussions of spirituality. The personal (the inner) and the social (the outer) are the sites of struggle here, that is, when what we are being asked to do comes in conflict with our personal beliefs. How do educators resolve such conflicts, especially when they are federally imposed? Huebner called for educators to understand the sociocultural context of their work and provided a language for what they experienced. The language used was the language of critique, a language that asked for reflection on the context in which educators found themselves. The language was also the language of philosophy, an inquiry into what was real, what was known, and what was of value.

Another essay that continues an analysis of schooling and the language of curriculum is entitled *Is There a Curriculum Voice to Reclaim?* by Michael W. Apple (1990). Apple began his essay with a quote from Herbert Spencer, who asked "What knowledge is of most worth?" (a philosophical question). He suggested a better way to frame the question was "*Whose* knowledge is of most worth?" This immediately situated the question within an arena of power (the sociocultural context). He raised questions about the prevailing concerns over schooling at that time—e.g., "panic over falling standards, rising illiteracy rates, fear of violence in the schools, the perceived destruction of family and religious values" (p. 342). He argued these concerns opened the way for "culturally and economically dominant groups to move arguments about education into their own arena by emphasizing standardization, productivity, and a romanticized past when all children sat still with their hands folded and learned a common curriculum" (p. 343).

Apple (1990) asked the reader to examine the history of the curriculum field. The result would suggest there was no "golden age" for curriculum scholars, that curriculum scholars had little impact on the debates regarding the nature or content of the curriculum. He stated "it is a flight from acknowledging where power often lies and an even more dangerous flight from seeing the real depth of the problem." The real depth of the problem was the objective conditions that surrounded the lives of educators. Education was becoming increasingly politicized and subject to legislative control at the local, state and federal level:

> Test-driven curricula, hyper-rationalized and bureaucratized school experiences and planning models, atomized and reductive curricula-all of these *are* realities. There *has* been a de-skilling of teachers and curriculum workers, a separation of conception from execution as planning is removed from the local level, and a severe intensification of educators' work as more and more has to be done in less and less time. Power over curricula is being centralized and taken out of the hands of front-line educators, and this process is occurring at a much faster rate than are the experiments with school-based governance models. (p.347)

Apple argued we shouldn't be surprised by this process, that the loss of power and control in the workplace as well as in daily life was quite prevalent. Apple argued that the real issue was not what was happening, but why it had taken curriculum scholars

so long to realize the connection between education and conflicts that were social, economic, political, and ideological in nature. Problems within schools could not be solved by looking only within schools.

Apple (1990) concluded his essay by offering a hopeful position for educators. Like Huebner, yet more forcefully, he urged educators to take action.

> Only by forming coalitions to restore a democratic vision in education will we be able to restore the voice of curriculum scholars to the public debates over whose knowledge should be taught. If we continue to stand above the fray, perhaps we don't deserve to have our voice restored . . . . The right has done a good job of showing that decisions about the curriculum, about whose knowledge is to be made "official," are inherently matters of political and cultural power. And unless we learn to live in the real world and to find a collective voice that speaks for the long progressive educational tradition that lives in so many of us, the knowledge taught our children will reflect the fact that power is not shared equally. The sidelines may be comfortable places to sit. But sitting there will give us little influence on the lives of real children and teachers. (pp. 347-348)

The voices of curriculum scholars such as Kliebard, Huebner, and Apple serve as examples of the link we see between current discussions of spirituality and past discussions of the curriculum. Movements in both spirituality and curriculum focus on the search for meaning, purpose, and authenticity. Educators, as individuals, have taken positions that reflect that inward search; but collectively, educators have not turned outward to re-engage the world for the sake of children. Instead, their outward stance has been directed at the schools. Both Huebner and Apple argue eloquently that engaging the schools is not enough.

Concluding Thoughts

The current movement in spirituality is extending into both K-12 and higher education. There is discussion at both levels of the need for the spiritual (not religion) to be a recognized part of the curriculum, to enable individuals to find personal meaning in the curriculum. Is this interest in the spiritual an attempt by educators to fill the void created by an externalized curriculum? If educators embrace the spirituality movement as a solution to feel better about the current situation in schools they will once again be misguided. A move to embrace spirituality as a solution to educational problems may be nothing more than "a bandwagon" (Huebner, 1975). We believe that the void created by the externalized curriculum represents the void in individual lives outside of school. Embracing spirituality will not solve that problem.

In this essay we have explored two themes—first, the importance of educators having a deep understanding of the purpose and meaning of their work, and of themselves in relation to that work, and second, the need for educators to recognize and address the realities outside of education through their work for the sake of

children. Both of these themes are represented in the current discussions of spirituality, as well as past discussions of curriculum. The notion of spirituality and deeper philosophical thinking/understanding about the curriculum strikes a cord with us. All education is based on ontology, epistemology, and axiology. What makes schools distinctive, however, is philosophy,

> …the beliefs and values that create our sense of what makes life worth living, and therefore what is worth teaching and how we should teach it. In our drive to be "research-based," we tend to forget that between the science of learning and the practice of teaching lie important value judgments that color our reading of the research and the implications for practice we derive from it. These value judgments reflect deeply held philosophical worldviews. (Ferrero, 2005, p.8)

Current discussions of spirituality and yearnings for meaning in life are part of an ongoing search by educators for a curriculum that matters. However, as Huebner and Apple make very clear, educators are misguided in that search. It is important for educators to turn inward in a search for meaning and a more authentic self, but an inward search is not enough. Educators must, then, turn outward and re-engage the world on behalf of children. A focus on schools is not enough. Schools are not the isolated problem, but rather, are reflections of the world. Until society values justice and integrity for all citizens, society will continue to shape schools, and the curriculum, in meaningless ways, ways that leave educators and their students spiritually (and philosophically) malnourished.

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