

The Evolution of Research on Curriculum Understanding Paradigms in China and Abroad

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Abstract: From the 1970s to the 1990s, the curriculum field in the United States had undergone a profound revolution of curriculum "paradigm shift", from the traditional curriculum field centered on curriculum development to the contemporary curriculum field centered on curriculum understanding, and curriculum concepts and methodologies had experienced a comprehensive reconstruction. Chinese scholars launched their researches on curriculum understanding relatively late, most of which were based on foreign research results, while local theoretical researches on curriculum understanding is still insufficient. Sorting out curriculum understanding paradigms in China and abroad is not only a way to go back to the origin of the research, trace the roots and grasp the development vein of the research issues, but also a way to stand on the "shoulders of giants", look far ahead of the research issues, interpret theories from different perspectives, and explore innovations.

1. Introduction

In the 1970s, an important paradigm shift took place in the field of curriculum, with the "curriculum development paradigm" stepping down from the pedestal and the "curriculum understanding paradigm" becoming popular in the field of curriculum studies. Pinar, the famous American curriculum expert declared: "That was the era of curriculum development. Curriculum development: born in 1918, died in 1969". In 1970, sociologist Charles Silberman published his book, *Crisis in the Classroom: the Reconstruction of American Education*, which is also seen as one of the hallmarks of the paradigm shift in curriculum studies. Silberman criticized the paradigm of curriculum development represented by Taylor's Principle, arguing that traditional curriculum studies ignored the differences in cultural, racial, ethnic, and political stance contained in the fact-based curriculum materials in curriculum practice.

2. Relevant research abroad

After the 1970s, with the overall shift in the paradigm of curriculum researches, the field of curriculum and the way of its interpretation also changed, and the curriculum moved further away from the intention and control of normative, systematic and logical knowledge towards a plurality of discourses and texts, and became a symbolic representation to be identified and analyzed in a variety of ways. Curriculum research has moved from the paradigm of "curriculum development"

and its discourse to the paradigm of "curriculum understanding", thus creating "multiple discourses of understanding" under the paradigm of "curriculum understanding", the essence of which is a shift in the concept on curriculum and knowledge. This shift stems from the realization by curriculum researchers that curriculum research is no longer confined to the paradigms and discourses of curriculum development under the paradigm of scientism. The internal and external environments and research issues of curriculum research are gradually characterized by diverse standpoints, concepts, knowledge, and discourses, therefore it is a trend to reconstruct the traditional discourses of curriculum development.

2.1 Curriculum Understanding Paradigm under Conceptual Reconstruction

On the one hand, contemporary American curriculum researches expand outward, placing curriculum in a wide range of social scenarios, understanding and constructing the meaning of curriculum from a comprehensive perspective of politics, economics, culture and etc., and contributing to political curriculum discourse, racial curriculum discourse, feminist curriculum discourse, and post-structuralist curriculum discourse. On the other hand, curriculum research delves inward, that is, curriculum research goes deep into both the interior of children's daily educational life and the curriculum researchers' own life, and through reflection on these specific lives, the purpose of understanding and constructing the meaning of the curriculum is achieved, opening the way for phenomenological curriculum discourse and autobiographical curriculum discourse.[1] The transformation of American education itself and the conceptual reconstruction activities in the field of curriculum have led to a fundamental paradigm shift in curriculum research, towards a discourse of "understanding curriculum".

Both Pinar and Grumet consider the curriculum to be students' "lived experience", a reorganization of the individual's "biographical experience", something unique to the student's life world. She advocated that curriculum should not be discussed in terms of design, textbooks and learning process, but in terms of children's past experiences and future spiritual liberation.[2] For Grumet, "curriculum is the collective story of what children know and understand about our past, present, and future"[3]. But the truth is that curriculum as described and curriculum as lived or experienced are in a state of fragmentation. Not only do school curricula lack opportunities and contexts for students to have authentic experiences, but these authentic experiences are obscured by highly conceptualized content, resulting in curricula that fail to reflect the lived experiences of children and groups. The curriculum omits what is in the life world, so children have difficulty understanding and experiencing what they learn as they go along. This is where the conceptual reconstruction of curriculum takes place, a process of "reflective scrutiny" and a process of pursuit of self-knowledge. Grumet completes the conceptual reconstruction with the "autobiographical method" because it is a complete individual experience, "the center of human experience is its particularity, and in some certain sense even its eccentricity", "the profundity of human life can only be found in the realm of the independent individual"[4].

At the same time, the curriculum is also the "child" of culture, and the relationship between culture and curriculum is complex and interactive. The relationship between culture and curriculum is complex and interactive. It is mainly manifested in the following two aspects: on the one hand, curriculum is a cultural product that transmits culture, and the formation of curriculum relies on culture; on the other hand, curriculum modifies culture while transmitting culture. The process of reconstructing curriculum concept is essentially the process of seeking the meaning of educational experience for learners, who are the center of curriculum, and curriculum can be regarded as the generation and construction of learners' subjectivity.

2.2 Curriculum Understanding Paradigm under Post-modern Curriculum Perspective

Post-modernism is a pan-cultural ideology or tendency, whose essential characteristics are "anti-dualism, but materialization, decentralization and anti-integrity, advocating indeterminate internality and questioning scientific and technical rationality"[5]. Post-modern curriculum perspective is not only concerned with the design and realization of curriculum objectives, but also pays more attention to the development of individuals during the learning process. As a representative of the post-modern curriculum perspective, W.E. Doll, in his book *A Post-modern Perspective on Curriculum*, elaborates in detail the different paradigms of modernism and post-modernism curricula, and proposes a post-modernism curriculum paradigm with 4R characteristics. Post-modern curriculum research is committed to seeking curriculum understanding, opposing technical rationality in curriculum field, attaching importance to theory and research, focusing on learners' self-awareness and creativity, and promoting a holistic and connected view.[6]

Starting from the pre-modern thought in ancient Greece, then to Cartesian rationalism, Newtonian empiricism, and the model of scientific curriculum "Taylor's Principle", eventually to post-modernism curriculum paradigms, such as Schwab's practical curriculum paradigm, Piaget's equilibrated mode, Bruner's epistemology of empirical organization, Prigotzin's chaos theory, and Dewey's and Whitehead's process thought, Doll carefully elaborates and analyzes the enlightenment and impact of these theories and paradigms on curriculum field, and finally, on the basis of surpassing previous researches, puts forward a brand-new curriculum matrix, in order to bring a brand-new perspective to researches on curricula and educational theories. Doll hopes to examine a range of curricular concepts in terms of the perspectives, principles, issues, and methods put forth by post-modernism, and "while these concepts are not sufficient to redefine curriculum field, they are expansive and illuminating enough to provide a starting point for subsequent researchers"[7]. Arguing that the imperative for the curriculum field is to identify new theoretical foundations to replace Taylor's Formula Model of Educational Objective, he proposes a post-modernism curriculum matrix characterized by the four Rs-Rich, Recursive, Relational, and Rigorous. Richness comes from its openness and hypothetical nature, providing multiple domains for collaborative dialogue exploration. Regressiveness is important because, like Bruner's concept of a spiral curriculum, a rich curriculum emerges from the richness and complexity that comes from reflecting on itself and, from Dewey's perspective, offers opportunities for reflective reorganization, reconstruction, and transformation of experience. Relationality refers to constant search for connections between perspectives and meanings, taking into account the links between historical and cultural contexts and ways of perceiving relationships. Finally, rigorousness becomes a purposeful search for alternative associations and connections.

The constructed post-modern curriculum theory holds that teachers and students are the main subjects of the curriculum, and that students are the bearers of meaning. It emphasizes curriculum construction, curriculum understanding, the lively, intentional and rich nature of curriculum implementation, and curriculum should be close to people and life. The vibrant life world of teachers and students has a profound impact on teacher development and student growth. Emphasizing and reflecting on multicultural context of curriculum understanding will provide theoretical and empirical justifications for the future direction of curriculum development.

3. Relevant research in China

The research shift towards "understanding curriculum" in the United States has also set off waves in the field of curriculum research in China, providing a background for the study of "curriculum understanding". The new curriculum reform in the field of national fundamental education since 2001 and some problems highlighted during the reform process have attracted

attention and consideration of domestic scholars on the research related to teachers' curriculum understanding. In general, China's new curriculum reform still follows the scientific paradigm of curriculum development, as well as an administrative oriented curriculum promotion model. In the model of curriculum development under the scientific paradigm, curriculum development and curriculum implementation are linear and relatively closed, and the environments of teachers, students, and curriculum implementation are somehow neglected. Such curriculum development assumes that the intention of curriculum designers has been fully implemented and demonstrated in the discipline structure and the curriculum organization. Correspondingly, it is believed that as long as the teacher who can correctly comprehend and faithfully implement the curriculum, then the curriculum will inevitably achieve its function, and that the teacher's curriculum implementation should achieve the efficiency of the curriculum and the exact logic of curriculum development. This logic has obviously suffered setbacks in practice, and several concepts of curriculum reform and development put forward by curriculum managers have encountered various problems and confusions in teachers' practice and understanding. Therefore, in the field of curriculum studies, on the one hand, articles and comments criticizing teachers' curriculum practice and experience abound, and on the other hand, studies on the issues of teachers' curriculum understanding and curriculum resistance have begun to proliferate. The issue of teachers' curriculum understanding has become a common theme in curriculum development and theoretical research as well as in teachers' curriculum practice.

The prominent research achievement in this field in China is Jin Shenghong. In his book "Understanding and Education: An Introduction to Educational Philosophy Towards Philosophical Hermeneutics", he fully utilizes the analytical advantages of hermeneutics, from the viewpoint of understanding, elaborates in detail how educational meanings are generated, analyzes what kind of spiritual construction the educated have, and rationally clarifies the relationship between teachers and students in education, as well as issues such as the curricula of school education. It also analyzes rationally the relationship between teachers and students in education and the curricula of school education.[8]

Wang Xia proposes that the search for curriculum understanding methods is a feature of post-modern curriculum education exploration, which is characterized by diversity in understanding and each understanding has its own value, significance and rationality. The dominant paradigm theory of daily life does not exist, and all the inquiry is not dominated in an absolute position. From the exploration of the two paradigms of curriculum development and curriculum understanding, it can be seen that there is not only a clear relationship between the two, but also a close connection. The relationship between the "curriculum understanding paradigm" and the "curriculum development paradigm" is interdependent and transformative, but it is by no means a relationship in which one ends the other.[9]

From the perspective of curriculum history, Wang Baoxing comprehends the comprehensive innovation of curriculum objectives, contents, implementation, and evaluation triggered by the American curriculum paradigm shift from "curriculum development" to "curriculum understanding", and believes that this shift is the result of adapting American curriculum practice to the social progress and educational changes in the United States. The study of curriculum history plays an important role in paradigm shift, and its value and function have received unprecedented attention than ever before. As an emerging discipline, the study of curriculum history has been endowed with more explicit and abundant research value.[10]

4. Conclusions

Curriculum understanding paradigm is a "humanistic-understanding" oriented curriculum

research paradigm, aiming to break through the dominant position of "instrumental rationality" or "technological rationality" and return to the true value of "emancipatory rationality". After the 1980s, the curriculum was put into a broader context of understanding, searching for the "textual" meaning of the curriculum based on personal life experience and the spiritual world, and forming a colorful curriculum "discourse".

The paradigm shift in curriculum research is a kind of thinking conversion from "entity thinking" to "relational thinking", and curriculum issues should not be attempted to answer with simple definitions or conceptual statements. Due to the multiple attributes of the curriculum, the understanding of curriculum needs to go beyond the "single element theory", stand in a multi-perspective, multi-theoretical context to explore the curriculum, which is the way to solve problems in the field of curriculum research.

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