

My Final Curriculum Platform

Greg Moody

Arizona State University

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Introduction

As I stated in my prior paper, the field of education follows a pendulum-like shift in point of view that effects curriculum development in practice. This makes curriculum development possibly as widely varied as the number of people involved in curriculum (I have changed this statement from “curriculum developers” to “people involved in curriculum” because now I understand some would object to the term “developer”. As I have learned more about curriculum in this course, I have come to appreciate some of the other points of view in curriculum theory, yet I don’t believe it has affected where I stand in practice. Probably the greater exposure to more theory has only helped me cement my view more as I think some of the points the holists, laissez-faire and critical theorists are interested in are addressed (or purposely *not* addressed) in my platform. This *personal* platform is based on my biases and experiences and I am afraid there are many for these to draw on as I described in an earlier work. To explore my platform, I feel I need to separate the part of curriculum design that involves the structure of schools. Then I will describe my current platform and how it relates to the curriculum theories under examination in this course.

The Structure of School

Central to curriculum development is the environment which it is practiced in. In addressing my curriculum platform I feel the need to cover my platform regarding how the school should be structured. While there is some obvious confusion between *curriculum*, and *instruction*, I also find some blurring between this and *school structure*. What I mean by this is how classes (groups of kids), teachers, facilities, grading and schedules are organized within a school and a district. For example, elementary school is primarily based on one classroom, while high school is a series of different classes every hour. Middle school is often a combination of these. This results in more age grouping in elementary school and more student – centered course selection at high school. A student in the high school can be in an advanced math class, a middle level reading class and beginning science as well as take classes they have particular interest in.

I feel that the high school type model is a more appropriate direction for school structure. Some of the advantages are: more student centered classes (gifted kids can just be with older kids), easier for teachers (they can concentrate on a subject at a time and with similar ability levels) and allows for individual choices. Admittedly, there are some logistical issues with a full high school model for elementary age kids. A schedule would likely have to have, for example, math at the same time across the school. The variety of math classes for 1st to 6th grade would be as many as there would be teachers teaching at that time. This could easily accommodate a wide range of levels in classes. The other factor is that the students could move from class at one level to another level as appropriate. They would not be “stuck” at a level for 5 months, they may progress based on their ability and needs.

Grades are the other issue that needs to be addressed. There are many insidious problems with grades. Pope (2001) reported all 5 students she studied knew *grades* were the objective, not the school subjects. Among other disturbing comments, one of the students studied (Kevin) said:

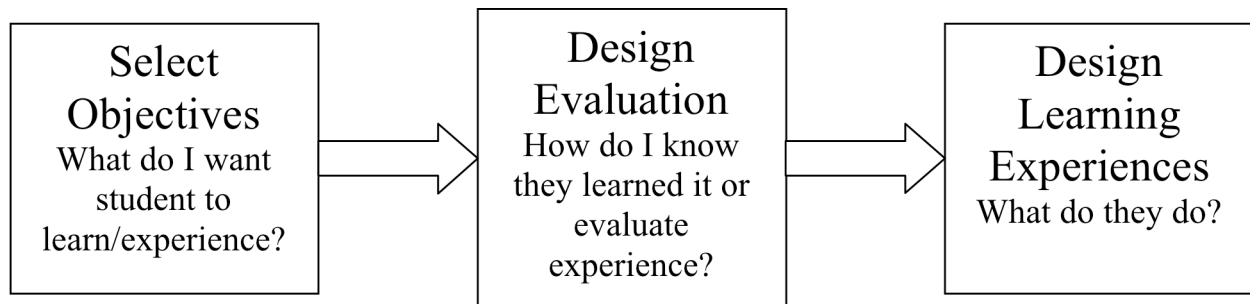
“People don’t go to school to learn. They go to get good grades, which brings them to college, which brings them the high-paying job, which brings them happiness, so they think.” (p. 4)

And this study didn’t take into account how “grades” negatively affects poorer students. Grades are inherently competitive, turning school into a scarcity based environment (there are only so many A’s to go around). The “good” students in Pope’s study used cheating and manipulation to improve their standing. This environment resulted in severe anxiety or breakdowns for each of them because of this over-focus on a “grade”. Until this structure is changed to recognize growth – that is, how much the student has improved, the teachers and the students will have differing objectives. If the effect of standardized testing is included, students (and teachers) will have to worry much more about grades and AIMS scores than what they learn.

My ideal curriculum platform includes these changes in the structure of school. That the classes are structured in a more flexible student-centered manner. That students performance is evaluated in terms of growth, not grades. This may be the primary reforms needed in school regardless of other curriculum theories. While I will describe what, in some ways is a very linear platform for “curriculum” I feel these changes to schools address many of the issues the holists have with school today. Dewey (1963) himself mentions growth as a goal of educational experience (and further detailed it as “when, and only when, development in a particular line conduces to continuing growth does it answer to the criterion of education as growing” (p. 36)).

My Platform

Even after examining other curriculum theories, I still have a linear bent. I think I have addressed many of the concerns of holists within my curriculum platform (I doubt the laissez-faire people would like it). I have similar stages and philosophy to Tyler (1949), but I feel the steps should be in a different order. In addition, I believe the development should follow a top down approach, that is, first the long term objectives are selected, then developed to the degree of appropriate detail, then shorter term objectives are processed through the same model. See the figure below:



This is the base model for developing curriculum I would propose. First, I select the objectives (like Tyler), then design the evaluation. In other words, in a very linear way, I (or more specifically a team of educators) would decide what the students should learn (Select Objectives) and then design how we are going to evaluate them (Design Evaluation). The intent here is to minimize the influence of the designed/selected learning experience on the evaluation. For example, if I was to design a curriculum for a speech delayed boy, one objective may be moving from 60% of age appropriate speech to 75% of age appropriate speech within a 2 month period. Then I would define how we will know we got there (obviously in this case by the same tool that determined his delay). Only then would we work on the types of activities the boy would do.

In contrast to Tyler, the evaluation at this stage of design has the advantage that the final outcome will be measured directly relative to the objectives selected at the beginning. This has all of the best aspects of a more linear curriculum yet it allows the teacher and curriculum designer more flexibility. Even though during the actual teaching, the objectives will likely remain the same, the evaluation will likely remain the same, the methods may vary immensely. Teachers often try many different “tools” to reach a child. For example, if we are working on math curriculum for a 10th grade algebra classroom, we would select the objectives (they learn algebra), determine the method of evaluation (get correct answers on 3 tests of algebra problems), and then work on the experiences and activities they will do. Of course the actual curriculum and objectives are much more detailed.

Selection of Objectives – What vs. Who

Tyler suggests many sources to use when selecting objectives: the learners, contemporary life, subject specialists, philosophy and a psychology of learning. I agree that each of these sources are important, but I would emphasize the more important focus is on *who* selects the objectives. I differ with the point of view that curriculum should be developed at the school or class level. Clearly, teachers and school level administrators are important to developing curriculum. However, I am sure I show my biases when I assert that it's important for the district to be primary in developing *objectives*. I know my bias may come in part by not being experienced in being a teacher in an Arizona district environment. I do however, have experience as I teach and design curriculum for many different schools. While there are some advantages of site-based curriculum design are important and teachers may have a better understanding of more specifics at a particular school or for a particular student, the advantages for the students

in selecting objectives at a high level are numerous. Further, there are distinct disadvantages of the more local level for curriculum development.

Allowing individual teachers to completely develop their own curriculum (at least in terms of selecting objectives and evaluations) is flawed for a variety of reasons. One common theme to any education is that it should be cumulative – that is, it builds on prior knowledge. In most public schools, that is manifested most obviously by advancing a grade level. If a teacher selects their objectives (or students do) then there is no way to ensure the next class they attend will “tie” with these objectives. Another issue is the instruction vs. curriculum difference. I feel these are two very different (admittedly interrelated) skills. Teachers need to motivate, transfer knowledge, and be able to adapt to students (oh yes, and do a bunch of administrative stuff on a tiny budget). Curriculum design should entail review of research, input from all (or a manageable number) of associated parties, and a long term outlook on objectives (K to graduation). It’s difficult for a teacher to have time, energy or resources (let alone skills) to do this. They definitely should have input on the curricula and should be given autonomy to adapt and adjust. This is another argument for design of the evaluation as the second stage of curriculum development – because they can adjust the experiences the student has, and the evaluation will be based on the *objective* (rather than possibly whether the student completed enough of the experiences/tasks/worksheets).

Looking at curriculum development at a higher level, I would assert, then, is preferable to at the teacher (or student) level. Firstly, as mentioned before, the developer would have access to the combination of the resources of all the schools in the district – teachers, administrators, possibly students and parents. Secondly, I feel the teachers and school administrators can then concentrate on the process of teaching, rather than curriculum design. This may sound a little like Franklin Bobbitt, but this is not an efficiency

motivated opinion, I simply believe that a more robust and better curriculum can be developed at levels that are low enough to have a perspective on the students and community, but high enough to take advantage of more resources.

To address how the students individual needs are more closely addressed, I refer to the earlier discussion regarding curriculum vs. instruction. I would emphasize teacher training and the understanding that the teacher should have autonomy to monitor and adjust what occurs in the classroom as long as it is consistent with the longer term objectives. In addition, understanding the effect of measuring results will result in more *learning* and *growth* outcomes instead of grades as outcomes. An example of the ideal classroom would have the teacher working with a group of cross-age, but similar ability kids. The teacher would know the objective of his/her class is to understand algebraic equations by the end of the quarter. The results of the end of quarter would determine where the student would go, and even during the quarter the teacher may suggest moving a child to another class level based on intermediate evaluations. The teacher would be able to vary the experiences as long as it resulted in growth at an acceptable level. In fact, the more uniform a curriculum, the more potential for multiple choices of experiences for a teacher to draw from.

Where My Platform Fits...

My position may seem like it pushes the boundary very much toward Bobbitt, but it is not rooted in efficiency but in effectiveness. I feel this would result in an improved curriculum for the reasons outlined above. I am not promoting a national curriculum development (or national “standards”) because curriculum development at that level is removed too far from the student. The developer needs to be someone (or some people) in touch with the students and community as well, but still with more resources and a somewhat broader view. So while I agree with a more linear approach, I also understand

Eisner's (1998) point of view about some problems with developing a standardized curricula such as the issues with developing a curricula that is "intellectual in character" (p. 186). I do feel he is missing some points regarding uniformity. If it is only for comparative purposes, then I agree, it's unimportant and potentially detrimental. However there are some distinct advantages to some uniformity in curriculum design. First, the more uniform a curriculum, the more identical resources for the students (textbooks, learning materials, etc..) may be developed (in fact, if the curriculum developer examines available materials, they may include more in their design). Also, what one teacher in a school develops, could be used by other teachers. Similarly, uniformity may promote *stability*. If curriculum is changing, then it is tough to invest time, money and resources in developing learning materials as mentioned before. The more insidious problem is in teacher training. How many times do teachers have their goals shifted, have changes in the structure of their discipline (ex. from whole language to phonics), have philosophical differences in the amount of homework a student should do – the list goes on and on within every district I interact with. I constantly hear teachers frustrations because of instabilities in the school, the district, the community (see the attached article in Appendix I from the March 8th, 2005 Arizona Republic regarding the AIMS test).

I also feel Eisner is missing the point regarding recognizing differences between students in developing curriculum. I agree with the statement "... the reality of differences – in region, in aptitude, in interests and in goals – suggests that it is reasonable that there be differences in programs" (p. 180). In my proposal, we *would* be recognizing the differences related to community, but in understanding how to deal with these issues, I feel that this is where the differences between curriculum and *instruction* are crucial to distinguish. No matter how well we design a curriculum, it is impossible to account for all the individual differences in students and I account for this with a more flexible school structure. Within any class – gifted, special needs, math, science, reading, physical

education – there will be different levels of talent, interest, skill and issues. There are also differences in emotional state, in socioeconomic status and physical health that may change week-to-week, or even moment-to-moment. Perhaps instead of focusing so much on individual differences at the curriculum level, these energies can be spent on *developing* teachers that are capable of handling all of these differences. I don't know of anyone who remembers the teacher who made an impact on their lives say they did it because the school's curriculum was great – it was always that the *teacher was great*. It was the teachers ability to connect and get the message (i.e. learning) across to the student. Uniformity, stability and a somewhat higher level approach to curriculum design would free us to help develop better teachers so they would be able to use a fully developed curriculum, to help students the most.

Further Developing Objectives

Moving on to developing objectives in more detail, I agree with Tyler in terms of how to state objectives. His example: “to write clear and well organized reports of social studies projects” describes the behavior and the area of life which the behavior will operate. I would add that it's important to develop objectives which fit into a larger educational goal. In my martial arts experience there are abstract objectives such as discipline that fit this model well. In schools, they often purport “life skills” as part of their curriculum (Faircrest High's values – “be punctual, prepared, tolerant, honest, respectful responsible”) (Pope, 2001, p. 1). For example, an objective in terms of developing life skills for kids might be “to understand the concept of discipline and apply it to school and home life”. Then the sub-objectives would be “to demonstrate discipline at home by cleaning up my room without being asked.”. So all objectives should start with high level objectives and then follow it up by breaking it down to lower level objectives. Evaluation of the results could be with parent reports of behavior at home.

Designing Evaluation

In designing evaluation, an important consideration is the *purpose* of the evaluation. While validity, reliability and objectivity are important, I feel for curriculum related or instructional related evaluations, there should be an aspect of *resolution*. In other words, evaluation should be used to provide a “high resolution” insight into the students state of progress towards the objectives, not as pass/fail or grading system. The *objectives* of learning algebra can be very specific (ex. know how to solve equations of single digit multipliers for single variable unknowns). Evaluations on the other hand are tools for determining the results of the learning experiences, and that is one of the primary methods in addition to teacher recommendation to determine what the student does next (not for “grading”). This is another reason I feel the evaluation stage should come sooner in the curriculum process – because the developer will consider how evaluations help teachers determine whether the learning experiences are working, to what degree and whether they need to adjust the experiences.

This brings up the current issue of “high stakes” testing and really any form of standardized test. I disagree with the movement towards this type of testing and agree with much of what McNeil says regarding the reforms that have pushed us away from teaching to accomplish a useful objective and into a situation where we are forced to “teach to a test”. As stated before, evaluation is to provide insight and as a tool to measure the students progress toward objectives – not as an end in itself. The high stakes movement is certainly “Bobbitt-ian” in nature. In fact, it almost seems *Orwellian* in nature when one reads about the “Guerilla TAAS” team that’s purpose was to motivate the students and faculty for taking the high stakes TAAS test (McNeil). There are obvious issues with construction of these types of tests, including, but not limited to lack of normative, validity and reliability data. As Sacks also points out, there are inherent

problems with testing of this nature for example: “if standardized tests are anything, they are speeded.” (p. 212). If you are a slow writer (or slow at “bubbling” the score sheet) you are going to suffer. Further, Sadler’s (1998) phenomena of correct answers actually decreasing with time illustrates how even the concept of tests and how to interpret them is in question. There are, however, some dangerous statements in this debate that threaten us to move toward losing *any* control in curriculum at the level I propose. Some sort of state or governmental attention to educational objectives is not inherently bad - it just appears like *this* application of the government’s attention will turn out bad (OK – I guess we can say it *is* turning out bad). What if the attention was focused on improving teacher training and education – the *instruction* part – rather than the curriculum objective part? I am afraid that these debates and the results of these actions will result in attention shift too far towards differences in curriculum, when it should shift towards teacher training. In any case, based on my observation of educational curriculum, the pendulum may shift too far in the other direction.

Design of Learning Experiences

In the design learning experiences stage, I propose a flexible approach that combines a base organization, overlaid by a variety of possible learning experiences. In other words, the developer would design and select activities, then order them in a logical way so they have continuity from activity to activity. This is similar to Tyler, but the difference is that the curriculum should allow for a variety of alternate activities, both to replace the activity planned in the structure, and to allow for supplemental activities to be included in the students experience. This is one of the less linear parts of my platform because I don’t have a fully pre-determined content (as the teacher has some choices in what they select to do). One example is, if a class is supposed to write about “what they want to do when they graduate”, or a current topic, perhaps if it was a day of a tragedy

(like the Challenger disaster) occurs - the teacher may choose to switch to the current topic. If it was a group of older kids and many were 6 months from graduating, the first topic might be the best. Another example is perhaps the science teacher was studying tree bark. They may have 3 or four options such as chemical analysis, spectrographic analysis, or going outside and examining the tree.

An oversimplified curriculum design may look like this:

Objective	Evaluation	Experiences
Master adding two single digit numbers	Perform a written test with 20 problems adding two single digit numbers	▪ Pages from the math workbook ▪ Count 2 sets of objects (physical drill) ▪ Lecture ▪ (as desired) select from a variety of fun math games.

The actual learning experience would be the first three items. A teacher would have the option to do the math games if desired. The proposed stage for design of learning experiences needs to have flexibility built in so the teacher has the room to do other activities (overlay curriculum) , while still providing a base curriculum ensuring continuity lesson-to-lesson, class-to-class, and grade-to-grade so students can advance to the next level class fairly easily.

Responses to Other Theory

Dewey & Other Holists

Fundamentally I like the holistic concepts but I feel they are impractical as a serious complete answer to education. I have already mentioned Dewey as I use a similar approach of measuring educational results in terms of growth and how to define the growth. I also like and agree with delving into directing education as “development from within”. (Dewey, 1963, p. 17) My primary issue with using holistic theory in actual

practice is simply that I strongly value making my solution *practical*. I don't feel the holist point of view is reproducible except in unique situations. The Peninsula school, for example, has some wonderful characteristics such as the non-competitive environment, the shared responsibility (ex: students clean the classrooms) and the student involvement in the curriculum. To me, it's clearly a unique case where parents, students, teachers and administrators are in "synch" and buy into all the concepts. I feel my proposed platform addresses the issues holists have (such as focus on growth) to the degree that it's *practical*. Maybe it's my bias regarding human nature - I don't believe I could supply the world with teachers who were good enough or students who were as cooperative – they are a special case. In addition I don't know how the system would react in an inner city environment, or in Europe. My value is that if a curriculum platform "works" it will "work" in many situations. Regardless, I would like to "steal" the aforementioned concepts from the holistic camp.

Holist theory can contribute to curriculum in some other areas as well. Beene's (1997) *integrated curriculum* can suggest to teachers alternatives for selected experiences. Kohl (1976) suggest "math, reading, science, history and so forth are only kept separate at the cost of diminishing what can be learned". While I am not promoting other aspects of the holist agenda, perhaps a teacher could have objectives and evaluation as outlined above, but within their autonomy as "selectors" of learning experiences, could use these concepts. As an example, say the objective was the math one above with the objective of being able to add two digit numbers. A teacher could collaboratively plan with the students to design their own experiences within the objective that, even in a subject class (like math) could explore. Another use of this concept might be having one class among the classes in the day where the students may study in this nature as a special project. Whether or not this can be used may depend on the actual objectives that are selected. Fogarty's (1991) 10 models of integrated curriculum may

also add to what teachers in my model could do. Similar to the “integrated” model (p. 64), teachers in my school might team up to “connect” the curriculum. For example having the reading classes read different books on spiders while the science classes study spiders (again, different levels of depth). Barone’s (1993) and Egan (1989) also suggests further ideas for shaping learning experiences. I hope not to devalue these holists work by placing it with a largely linear framework, but I feel that I can add their wisdom to the students experience while still maintaining the platform I am promoting.

Laissez-Faire Theory

Laissez-Faire theorists have an expectation that the student will drive their own learning. This extreme student-centeredness is supported by the concept of biological self-education – that is, we have a biological drive to educate themselves, or more specifically, to “facilitate acquisition of the culture” (Gray and Chanoff, 1984, p. 88). Therefore the kids themselves can drive all aspects of learning if they can choose to expose themselves to resources. The example school – Sudbury Valley School – seems to be a wonderful place to just “be”. From their website:

“The fundamental premises of the school are simple: that all people are curious by nature; that the most efficient, long-lasting, and profound learning takes place when started and pursued by the learner; that all people are creative if they are allowed to develop their unique talents; that age-mixing among students promotes growth in all members of the group; and that freedom is essential to the development of personal responsibility.” (http://www.sudval.org/01_abou_01.html)

Not only do the students have full autonomy over what they do at school, they actually “control” the hiring and firing of the staff! Some might question whether this will result in

“properly” educated graduates – from the point of view of integration into society and future work or college. Again from their website:

“We have studied what happens to kids after they leave here and found that some eighty percent, in general, went on to college.”
(http://www.sudval.org/01_about_09.html)

This is counter to my own experiences in school, but it is completely consistent with my personal experiences outside of school. I was a very independent learner. In many ways this school and this philosophy “feel” like a wonderful place to be and learn. Nevertheless, I feel there are two main concerns I have:

- 1) Like any “unusual” school, there is a self-selection issue. Firstly which parents would accept such a school. Secondly the parents would have to pay a rather high tuition (\$5400 annually). This would filter out many people and leave the school with fairly specialized population.
- 2) To accept the school philosophy, and laissez-faire theory in general, one has to accept some fundamental views of human nature that people are self-motivated, good and have this self-education direction. It would be nice, but I can’t bring myself to have that much faith in human nature.

Therefore I feel the laissez-faire theory is interesting and should be studied further, however I don’t feel there is much from this camp to add to my platform.

Critical Theory

In general, I am philosophically against promoting a social agenda to students. I am not, however, against teaching critical thought and exposure to real and current issues. At the Harmony school they would discuss critical thinking “critical thinking implied establishing links between one’s individual actions and thoughts and the social historical and cultural contexts within which one lives; that is, critical thinking implied, not

only reading the word, but reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987). I think this a noble pursuit, however, it *is* within my curriculum platform to accomplish this. What I strongly object to is “pushing” an ideology. I agree there is an ideology (hidden curriculum) in schools – I would support, however, working to identify and manage it so maximize how much the student can develop their own ideology. Despite Goodman’s (1998) reassurances, (and the fact that I am in agreement with much of the “connectionist” ideology) there were some disturbing activities with the kids at Harmony such as the clear bent to the “presidential discussion” where the teacher focused on the fact that none of the presidents were women or minorities (p. 148). I think this is an interesting topic, if it was the primary focus on presidents (you can’t tell if it was just a part of the discussion) then I may resent my child being “pushed” for a certain agenda. This seems like a fairly “hidden” curriculum to me.

I am interested in Anyon’s (1980) outlook on the “hidden curriculum” in schools. She theorizes that the social class (as defined by people’s relationship to physical capital, to other people at work, and type of work) of the environment around a school *reproduces* the social class in the students – the status quo. There are many questions that could be asked such as whether it’s the parents that are the force acting here rather than the school, or is it the government with an insidious conspiracy to keep the working class down. Regardless, I feel that this is actually supportive of my platform for four reasons.

- 1) If curriculum is developed at a higher (in this case maybe a state) level, there would be less tendency to “reproduce” the extremes because the objectives would be consistent between the schools.
- 2) If grades were not the primary concern, the difference between the “haves” and “have nots” would be minimized because there would be a much less competitive environment.

- 3) Teacher training could focus on optimizing instruction to minimize the differences. Teachers would have training time to focus on how to help the kids in their situation.
- 4) The “flexible” class approach would allow kids to progress at a rate more specific to their abilities.

So, I feel my proposed approach could reverse or minimize the effect Anyon is describing.

Summary

In summary, the structure of the school needs to be “re-modeled” so there is little focus on grades and strong focus on growth. Then the schedule of the school should be re-examined to allow for classes to be in more of a flexible structure more like high school. Once that is done, the actual curriculum can be put in place.

The key to my philosophy of curriculum design is that it goes through three stages – select objectives (*what should they learn*), design evaluation (*how do I know they learned it*), and design learning experiences (*what they do*). This is similar to Tyler in form, but very different in detail. The key to the select objectives stage is to select the long term objectives, then break them down into smaller objectives both in terms of specifics and time. In the evaluation stage the curriculum designer needs to consider *resolution*- the evaluation needs to not just tell us what the student knows or doesn't know, but exactly where they are in the learning process. The design learning experience stage is where we select experiences and order them, coming up with a base order of experience, then provide a further set of experiences that a teacher may do. The key differences with the Tyler model are 1) the order of the stages. 2) the experience design is to allow the teacher to be flexible and 3) The evaluation is to gain insight on the state of the student and requires high resolution to be effective. The difference between this and a strict linear approach is the teacher has some flexibility in choosing the experiences (content isn't pre-determined) and less of a focus on efficiency (the goal is to develop the best curriculum for students, not the most efficient for the bureaucracy). All of this is predicated on the structure of the school as well, including evaluation of growth instead of grades, and flexible classes. The platform is very much a linear one, but the school structure addresses many of the concerns of other types of curriculum theorists.

Non-linear theory can contribute to the platform in how the final stage – select learning experiences – is completed in practice. The teacher would have autonomy to use the holistic model in designing learning experiences, and also in integrating the curriculum between the classes. Critical theory also has something important to offer in terms on driving some objectives towards a “world” view and developing students ability to think critically. I object to the critical theorists motivation to push a particular ideological view. Laissez-faire theory doesn’t have much of a place in my platform – it is interesting for future study but doesn’t have anything to contribute to my view of curriculum theory.

I have also pointed out that my opinion is that curriculum design should be done at a higher level such as a district and that the teacher level should implement this curriculum and focus on improving *instruction*. The curriculum should be designed at the higher level by a group including administrators, teachers and possibly parents. One benefit is that the available resources (people, research, time, money) to develop objectives, evaluation tools, and experiences, are greater at a district level while the teachers and schools could focus on implementing the curriculum. It should not be developed at such a high level that we suffer from the problems that tests such as TASS and AIMS promote.

Instruction and teacher training is crucial to making this work because the teacher is the one that will be able to handle all of the individual differences that will occur within a classroom and in a school. No amount of curriculum design can cover all the situations that may come up at the classroom level. Unusual situations will be addressed by teachers (who have been given exceptional training on the curriculum and *being* teachers) who have the autonomy to adjust and modify the specific experiences of the students. In addition, I feel design at this level promotes the positive aspects of uniformity

and will also promote stability in curriculum. I believe this philosophy would make the best use of educational professionals resources and direct their energy towards the students.

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Appendix I

AIMS Article

AIMS debate is tougher than the test

(from, the Arizona Republic, March 8, 2005)

Ted Downing - My Turn

Mar. 8, 2005 12:00 AM

It's harder to follow the debate over the AIMS test than it is to pass the AIMS test.

Options and proposals are multiplying faster than a high school student who smuggled a calculator into an algebra exam.

Arizona taxpayers have spent \$44.2 million on a testing system that confuses taxpayers, raises stress levels among most adolescents (and their parents) and provides plenty of material for journalists, pundits and people with viewpoints on education, which means just about every Arizona resident.

Let's try to sort through the maze of AIMS options with a not-so-simple multiple-choice quiz:

- Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Horne supports:

- a) Keeping AIMS as a high-stakes, make-it-or-break-it test.
- b) Putting the AIMS scores on diplomas, but only if a kid passes the test and actually earns a diploma.
- c) All of the above.

The answer is c: All of the above.

- Sen. Thayer Verschoor and Rep. Andy Biggs, two East Valley Republican stalwarts, have supported:

- a) Doing away with AIMS as a requirement.
- b) Keeping the test.
- c) All of the above.

The answer is c: All of the above.

- The East Valley stalwarts now propose to:

- a) Keep the test as a requirement for graduation, but only if you can pass it.
- b) But, if a senior can't pass AIMS, go to Plan B:
Plan B:

1. Enroll in 75 hours of remediation classes.
 2. Maintain a 95 percent attendance record.
 3. Maintain a C average.
 4. Take the AIMS (but, in this option, you don't have to pass it).
- c) All of the above.**

The answer is c. Politicians love all-of-the-above answers.

• Superintendent Horne has a new plan. Now he wants to decorate a high school diploma with more little stickers, like Russian generals during the Cold War. The stickers would assert that a student passed one of three components of AIMS: math, reading or writing. The diploma would then indicate one of four options:

- a) High honors (lots of stickers).**
- b) Honors (some stickers).**
- c) No honors, but at least you passed AIMS (sorry, no stickers).**
- d) Flunked out of high school (no stickers) after 12 years and can look forward to:**
 1. Finding a job without a high school diploma.
 2. Reserving a permanent spot on the unemployment line.
 3. Preparing and taking an exam that you have now failed probably five times.
- e) All the above.**

Once again, the answer is all the above. If you figured this out by now, then it's smart to keep answering "all the above."

• Senate President Ken Bennett, R-Prescott, favors the following:

- a) Keep the status quo, warts and all.**
 - b) There is no option B. When you're the Senate president, it's your way or the highway.**
- Then there is the Ted Downing proposal, which, in effect, turns the whole discussion wrong-side-out and returns to why we started talking about AIMS and testing in the first place.

Businesses were upset about workforce development. Remember? AIMS was a means to improving that.

From the perspective of the market place, what new information do employers get for the money spent on AIMS? Not very much.

Before AIMS, kids either graduated or they didn't. After AIMS, you are

getting the same answers. Kids either are rated "pass" or "rejects."

I offered House Bill 2492, a market-based solution that would place raw AIMS scores on high school transcripts, not on the diploma, as Horne proposes.

After all, who can remember where we put our high school diploma?

Placing the scores on the transcripts puts more workforce information into the marketplace. It lets employers choose the value of a score rather than trusting government to stamp a kid Yes, No, or Maybe.

I also favor lifetime retesting on one or more of the AIMS elements, permitting adults to reposition themselves in the workforce. My market-based approach creates a pan-Arizona workforce abilities test, extending beyond K-12.

As for requiring it for graduation, I think this misses the point. The hope of carrots, not sticks, drives individual competition on the SAT exam.

AIMS policy has started to resemble those funny little Chinese finger-traps that many of us played with as a kid. In order to escape, one must push your fingers together. Do we trust the market enough to believe that individual competition between students will drive up a school's grades?

As a humble, populist Democrat, I have to be careful. The closer I get to AIMS, the weaker my faith in government. I fear that I am becoming a backslider who might support home schooling.

The writer, a Democrat, is an Arizona state representative. He represents District 28 in Tucson.