
Provoking Curriculum Conference
Spring, 2003

Ted T. Aoki’s Speech

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to meet Ted T. Aoki.

Let me first of all thank and congratulate CACS for holding this very, very unusual conference for me, a conference titled *Provoking Curriculum* in an endeavor to move into a new era, or in encouraging the current scholars and practitioners in education to consider the main of curriculum possibly in the new light or the new sound or the new key.

I would like to thank Dr. Terry Carson for the way in which he supported Rita to organize this conference and to support CACS in this endeavor to create a new movement in curriculum. Before I forget, I would also like to thank Dr. Terry for his remarks with regard to the times that I spent in the Department of Secondary Education where I got a mixed spark in moving towards a domain which I did not consider too much prior to my arrival at the university of Alberta.

I had not so much experience in writing academic work. As you have heard, it was in 1964 that I was invited to join the teaching staff at the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, and the thing that amazed me was the way in which all the courses in the Departments of Elementary Education and Secondary Education were all prefixed EDCNI, Educational Curriculum and Instruction. And it was then that I came to realize the significance of the term curriculum, and if I were going to teach at a teacher education institution dealing with EDCNI, I’d better come to learn a few things about curriculum.

The very term EDCNI puzzled me very much at first because the term curriculum was followed by the term instruction. As a teacher, I always
thought I was teaching the curriculum, and the notion of instruction was rather new to me. But the more I examined the terms curriculum and instruction, together with the graduate students who were on campus, we came to realize the way in which the term curriculum had been: by looking at the term instruction as technical kind of action, the term curriculum was understood to be a material thing that can be transmitted through a process.

Various students, including Terry, Linda Peterat, Walter Werner, and so on, began to push this notion. “Hey, this is not good enough.” And so it was rather interesting for me that the graduate students in our department started to wander off to other departments across campus, particularly, the department of philosophy which most of us avoided.

It was from contact with the philosophy department through the graduate students, that for instance, I became very familiar with Dr. Mackenzie, the head of the philosophy department, to the point that I still remember a call he gave me. He phoned me, when I was chair of the department, to ask if I won’t hire a fellow by the name of Robert Burch for one year because they were kind of afraid to hire him for three thirds. So I told Dr. Mackenzie, “That’s one third, one year. I think I can explain that.” And then I, at that time, created a course called *Curriculum and Ontology, Curriculum and Being*. Of course, Robert Burch was an expert in Heidegger’s work, and we were just moving into that domain, but it was the grad students who opened up the opportunity for him like that.

Of course, in the Department of Curriculum, department of Secondary Education, we got hell from the Department of Foundations because we were moving into their territory. I still remember. Dr. Birch, I understand, is still there. It was at this time that, as Dr. Terry indicated, that we became familiar with the notion of European philosophy, continental European philosophy, and that the possibilities that had evolved with curriculum had been limited and restricted because we had been unanimous in our discourse within the field of education in curriculum.

But about the same time, we found a fellow from the University of Rochester, who had particular interest in curriculum and had identified a term, a noun, and started to move it, Dr. William Pinar. The term that he introduced us to was the word *currere*. It was getting in touch with that kind of notion, *currere*, that helped us to move, to re-examine the notion of the curriculum, particularly as it was constructed by the Ministry of Education in our country. [To Bill Pinar] I don’t know if I ever talked to you about that, but your term *currere* has influenced us very, very much.

**Video Excerpt (1 minute)**

Another point that I would like to mention, if I may, is with respect to the way in which the whole notion of curriculum became meaningful for us,
and visible to us, particularly when we started to hear. What I am trying to point to is the way in which we endeavored together. Particularly the grad students (who moved into the area of phenomenology and hermeneutics and so on), who compelled the members of the staff and the department to stay with the graduate students because they were teaching us more than we were teaching them.

Video Excerpt (1 minute)

And this, I think, is a very crucial point. That’s why I am concerned with the nature of the structure of the department, basically the Department of Secondary Education which deals with graduate programs and undergraduate programs. It needs staff that are continuously examining themselves and are transforming themselves in order to accomplish this—the power and support of the graduate students working together, of course, I feel, is very crucial. So the way in which the administrators regard the grad program within the faculty and within the department, and the way in which the ideas discussed are being promoted and discussed amongst the students and staff can create a space of conversation more than a space of instruction. I think I try to stick to that and I think Terry will confirm that the students really took over the running of the operation.

In this connection, I would just like to mention one name because you [Bill Pinar] attributed to me quite a knowledge of a word I didn’t even know existed when I became a teacher/educator. In our group, amongst the graduate students, there was a young scholar, a teacher/student from the Netherlands. Max Van Manen is who I’m talking about, and it was he that brought to at least to me and to the faculty and to the department the possibility of pushing open the main of phenomenology. I still remember the time when he was in the midst of his dissertation. He was at that time following the rules of the establishment with respect to the language of the dissertation. In the midst of the dissertation writing, he phoned up and said he can’t write anymore unless he can use the personal pronoun ‘I.” That’s how objectively oriented we were then, at the time when Max Van Manen came to become a member of our graduate group. And for me, as a “young” scholar trying to understand the way of phenomenology through Max and to condone the writing of a dissertation in terms of narration was a big undertaking and a bigger risk for me. But I yielded to the argument that Max presented, and we succeeded in pushing, and I’m glad to know where he is right now.

Video Excerpt (2 minutes)

Finally, to conclude with just one word. After I came here to UBC, let me put it this way: UBC is my alma mater, and when I came here as a student, literally, there were 2500 students on this campus, and the Japanese Canadian students, the ethic Canadian students were not permitted to
register in the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Medicine, and, of course, there was no Faculty of Education because you got your faculty of education in 1953. But prior to that there was the Vancouver normal school, of course. Although the normal school was open to Japanese Canadians, Japanese Canadian graduates were not allowed to teach.

I just want to mention that because, following that, I had unique experiences and interesting experiences all the way through in order to become a teacher in Alberta.
I mention that because today we spend so much time remembering what you think I did and honoring me so much, and would like to indicate that I am here at my old alma mater. I am here. I am so proud to be a UBC grad, and so proud to be a member of CACS. And to be honored in such a way as you are doing tonight is for me something beyond my ken.

I would like to thank you for attending tonight, and thank you very much for re-texturing my text, and Rita I would like to thank you and Bill for coaxing me to put that book together, a bunch of anecdotes and attempted theoretical stuff for you to make sense of. I praise you and I thank you very much. Thank you.